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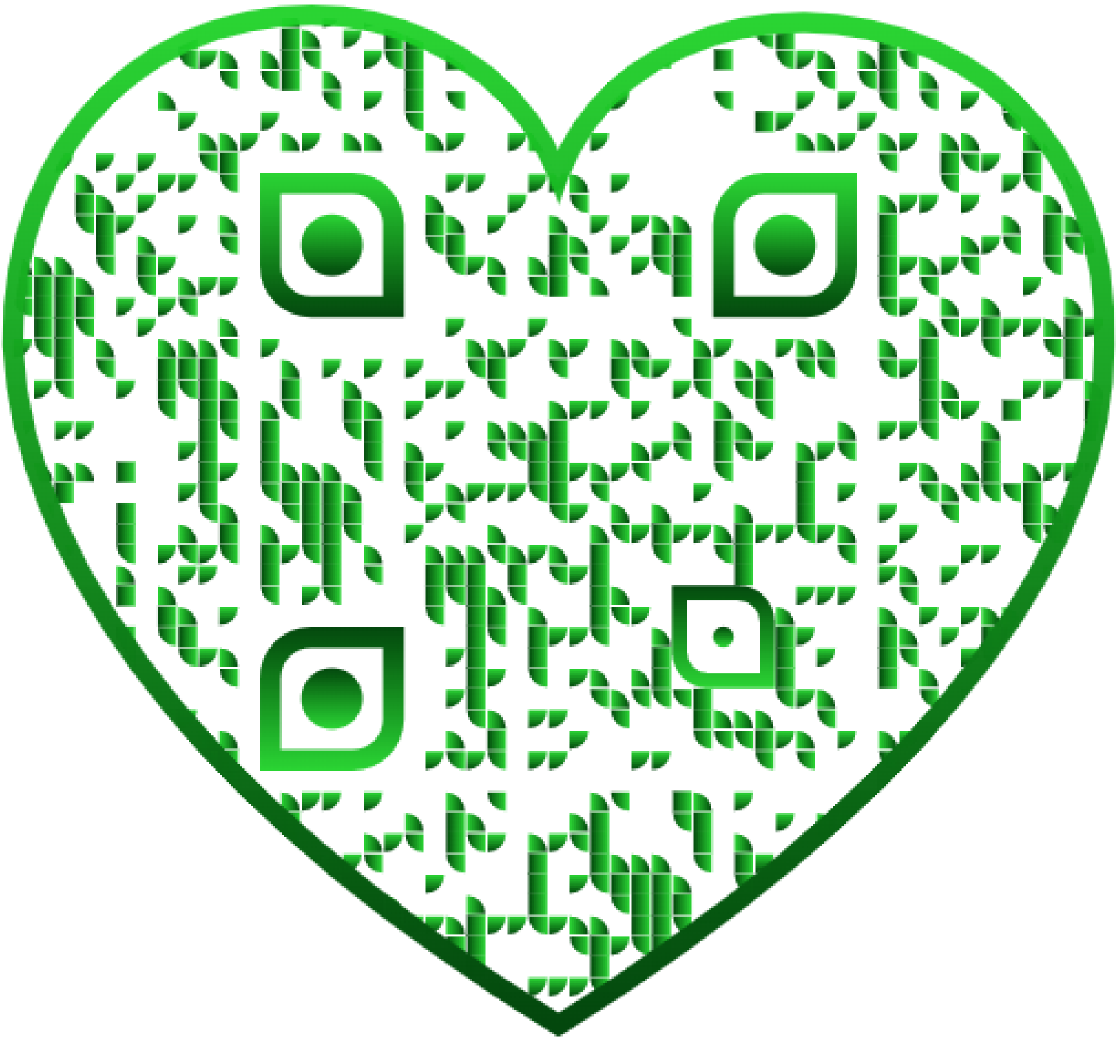

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CLASSIC POP

WELCOME

Pop landmarks don't come much bigger than Band Aid's iconic No.1 single *Do They Know It's Christmas?*, released in December 1984, or the spectacular Live Aid concerts the following summer in London and Philadelphia.

Originally prompted by Michael Buerk's heartbreaking BBC news reports about the Ethiopian famine, the Band Aid Charitable Trust fronted by Bob Geldof has subsequently gone on to raise an estimated £150 million.

Yet the charity has not been without its share of controversy over the past 40 years. As you'll no doubt have noticed, the headlines continue into the present day via recent statements made by Ed Sheeran and British-Ghanaian rapper Fuse ODG.

So as a fifth incarnation of *Do They Know It's Christmas?* is released to mark the single's 40th anniversary, we speak to latest producer Trevor Horn as well as original co-songwriter Midge Ure about its genesis story, evolution and some of the criticisms levelled at the track's lyrics. It makes for a fascinating read.

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And the time has come again when our team gets pop cultural whiplash as we survey the past 12 months of highlights covered in these pages, while also checking out what music fans can look forward to across the next year. 2025 is already shaping up rather nicely with a number of tantalising new albums on the horizon, plus numerous must-see tours from some of the biggest names in pop.

Elsewhere this issue, we serve up the entertaining return of Franz Ferdinand who, despite the rather foreboding album title, have reconnected with their sense of fun for studio LP number six, *The Human Fear*.

Haircut One Hundred's Nick Heyward and Les Nemes keep up the good-natured vibes as they reveal all about the band's latest reunion and David Gray takes us inside his moving new long-player, *Dear Life*.

Meanwhile, we're always looking to hear your feedback to improve *Classic Pop*, so please check out our latest Reader Survey – turn to page 45 to see how you can share your thoughts on the magazine. As a rather nice incentive, we've teamed up with our friends at NOW Music to offer a prize bundle worth £350 for one lucky reader who completes the survey.

Finally, a massive thank-you from all of us as Classic Pop Towers to everyone who's supported the magazine throughout 2024. I hope you have a great holiday season and a very happy and healthy new year.

Enjoy the issue!

Steve

Steve Harnell, Senior Editor
Follow me on X (Twitter): @steve_harnell

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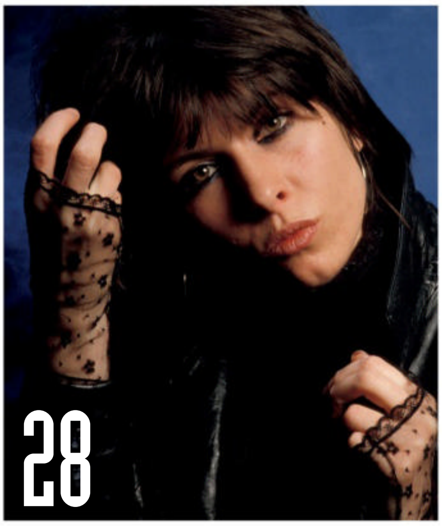

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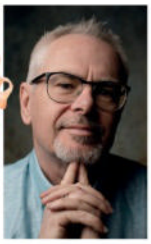

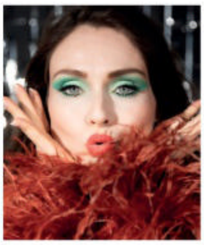

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WHAT'S YOUR MUSIC HIGHLIGHT OF 2024?

*Spoiler alert: A lot of us were rather taken by The Cure this year...

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*1 "Spectacular things come to those who wait."
*2 "My inner teenager was a very happy boy."
*3 "It feels more like an experience than an album per se, as personal as music gets."
*4 "He lost half his bodyweight in sweat during a thrilling performance."
*5 "Opulent performance meets opulent venue."
*6 "I was beginning to think that the follow-up to 2008's *4:13 Dream* wouldn't be arriving in my lifetime."
*7 "A show of solidarity, mutual respect and survival."
*8 "Even the mudbath conditions couldn't quell the joy of seeing the Manics and Pet Shop Boys perform in my hometown."
*9 "She understands fans want hits, hits, hits."
*10 "Possibly the most patient, gracious musical comeback of my lifetime."
*11 "A concert that was full of spooky fun and New Romantic glitz."

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

The winner of Best Writer, Specialist category, in 2022's British Society of Magazine Editors Awards, our latest issue sees **John Earls** meet Midge Ure and Trevor Horn for our Band Aid cover feature, catch up with Franz Ferdinand to hear about their latest LP *The Human Fear*, as well as overseeing our new albums and reissues reviews.

Jordan Bassett has written for *NME*, *Time Out*, *Spin*, *Grazia*, *Vintage Rock*, *Kerrang!*, *BBC Music* and many more. Formerly the Commissioning Editor (Music) at *NME*, he recently saw the publication of his first book, *Here's Little Richard*. In this issue, Jordan meets singer-songwriter David Gray who takes us inside his latest emotive studio album *Dear Life*.

Paul Kirkley makes his living from interviewing famous people with much more interesting and glamorous lives than his own. He is also, to the best of his knowledge, the only paid TV critic for a national supermarket chain. This issue, Paul meets Haircut One Hundred to hear about their reunion and forthcoming new album and also casts his eye over a boxset of Simple Minds' *Sparkle In The Rain*.

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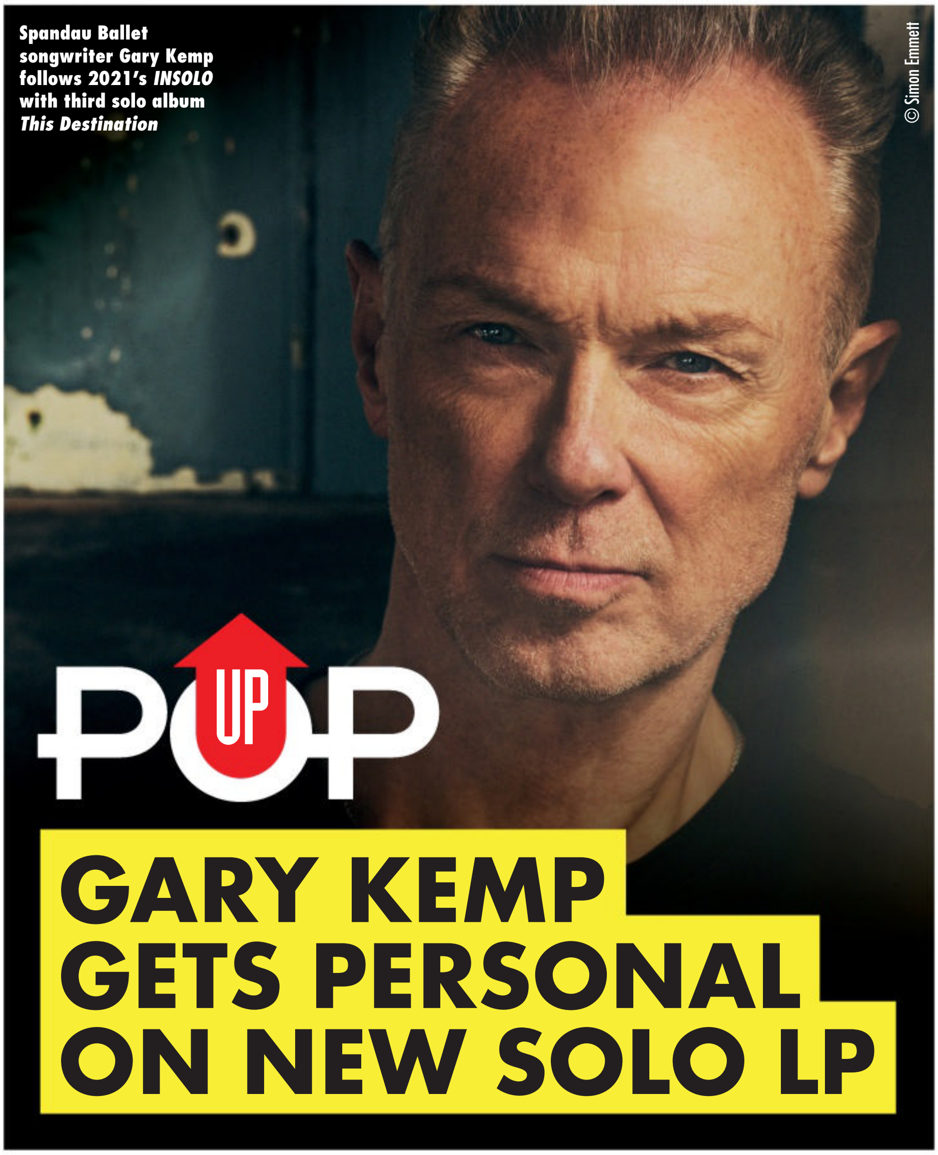


Spandau Ballet songwriter Gary Kemp follows 2021's *INSOLO* with third solo album *This Destination*

© Simon Emmett

POP UP

GARY KEMP GETS PERSONAL ON NEW SOLO LP

Gary Kemp has announced that his third solo album, *This Destination*, will be released on 31 January 2025 via East West Records.

The follow-up to 2021's *INSOLO*, the LP promises to be the Spandau Ballet co-founder's most personal to date and one which sees the singer-songwriter channel his own thoughts and feelings about the past, present and future.

Lead single, *Put Your Head Up*, reflects the semi-autobiographical nature of the 11 tracks. Kemp explained: "The song is essentially a conversation I was having with myself, trying to encourage positivity in the face of life's usual buffeting headwinds."

The album marks a journey of discovery for the songwriter who, in the years following the pandemic, hit a wall of anxiety and a lapse in self-belief. Kemp revealed how he was helped along the way by an unexpected telephone call from Richard Hawley: "I told him I'd been going round in circles trying to write something and he said, 'Okay, here's what you do. Go over to the piano and sit down and put your hands out over the keys. I'm going to go and you're going to write a fucking brilliant song.'"

The encouragement worked and the resulting track, *Work*, is a celebration of the unsung heroics of a parent's everyday life. Of the song, Kemp said: "I remember going into the factory with my dad one morning. I have this vivid recollection of the moment he put his brown overalls on over his clothes. To me, he was Superman putting on his cape."

Recorded at London's Reformation and RAK studios, the album features contributions from Kemp's long-time collaborator Toby Chapman, who also co-produced the record, as well as Gary's Rockonteurs podcast co-host, bassist Guy Pratt.

This Destination will be available on Red Gold vinyl, standard CD, deluxe CD and digital. A special Dolby Atmos mix of the album, created by Steven Wilson, will also be available.

GARY KEMP
THIS DESTINATION

LIVE AID MUSICAL TO LAUNCH IN WEST END

A new musical that retells the story of Live Aid is coming to London's West End next summer.

Just For One Day celebrates the iconic double-header of charity shows held at Wembley Stadium in London and Philadelphia's John F Kennedy Stadium. The new production will feature music from many of the artists who performed at Live Aid including David Bowie, U2, Queen, Madonna, Elton John, The Police, Diana Ross and Paul McCartney.

This unprecedented live music event, held on 13 July 1985, was seen by an estimated 1.5 billion people in 150 countries across the globe and has now raised over £114 million for famine relief in Ethiopia.

After a record-breaking world premiere at the Old Vic in January this year for the new production, the genesis story of those historic shows that changed the world will now transfer to the West End for a full run at the Shaftesbury Theatre from 15 May 2025.

The production has been penned by John O'Farrell (*Mrs Doubtfire*, *Something Rotten*) and is set to be directed by Luke Sheppard, who helmed *& Juliet* and *Little Big Things*. A total of 10% from the sale of tickets for the musical will be donated directly to the Band Aid Charitable Trust.

A North American version of the musical will be staged at the CAA Ed Mirvish Theatre in Toronto from 28 January to 16 March.

For more information and tickets, visit theliveaidmusical.com.

• **Read our cover feature on the complete story of Band Aid from pages 20-27**

STOP PRESS

A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS
SOME DREAMS

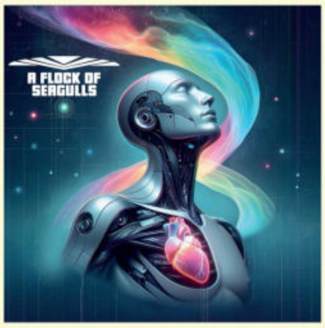
AUGUST DAY

★★★★☆

DESPITE MIKE SCORE BEING THE ONLY ORIGINAL MEMBER ON THE RECORD, A FLOCK OF SEAGULLS' NEW ALBUM RETURNS TO THEIR VINTAGE SOUND

Although billed as the first A Flock Of Seagulls album of new songs since 1995, there will be question marks on whether this counts as a proper AFOS LP. While the original line-up reunited for orchestral reworkings albums *Ascension* and *String Theory* in 2018 and 2021, none of them have made it onto Mike Score's new tunes.

There are 28 former members of AFOS listed on Wikipedia – only then-new keyboardist Sare Havlicek survives from *String Theory*. Fellow keyboardist Mikal Reid plus drummers Ben Lecourt and Alex Toff are veteran sessioners. Everything else, bar psychedelic trumpet courtesy of Beyoncé associate Kiku Collins on the album's most out-there moment, *Got To Get To You*, is played by Score himself.



So, what qualifies *Some Dreams* as AFOS' sixth fully new album, rather than Mike Score's second solo record after 2014's underrated *Zeebratta*? Quite simply, it sounds almost exactly like vintage A Flock Of Seagulls, as if it had been made in downtime during the sessions for 1984's *The Story Of A Young Heart*.

Score has told *Classic Pop* that he has, well, scores of unreleased songs since 1995's *The Light At The End Of The World*, and it's possible he's simply cherrypicked the best 10 – it's a varied album drawing together all of AFOS' incarnations.

Him is the most instantly familiar slice of Score's overblown romanticism from *I Ran* and *Wishing*, still yearning for an unfaithful partner 40 years on. *Valley To The Broken Dreams* is ripe for a great Extended Version, a galloping vintage synth riff and Score's rampant guitars combining for prime retro futurism worthy of the album's pulp sci-fi sleeve.

You're A Fool is a more genuinely forward-thinking drama, that successfully transports Score into Japan and Talk Talk's experimental ambience, but *Lovers And Strangers* shades it as the highlight, the perfect combination of all Score's colourful visions, including the ability to craft industrial-strength choruses.

Only on the drearily understated *Castles In The Sky* do you wish for Paul Reynolds' elegant guitars or Frank Maudsley's supple bass to liven up such a beige song. And even they probably couldn't do much with it, as Score's playing is so adept elsewhere on the album.

With so few records yet so many band members to his name, Mike Score is clearly a demanding perfectionist, not least on himself. Purely as an album, that doesn't matter here: 29 years on, he's made a record that is worthy of the band's name. He needn't spend his whole life wishing anymore. **John Earls**

Rum diary date for Pogues tour

The Pogues have announced their first UK headline tour in 13 years. Celebrating the 40th anniversary of *Rum Sodomy & The Lash*, the band are set to play the album in its entirety alongside B-sides lifted from singles *A Pair Of Brown Eyes*, *Sally MacLennane* and *Dirty Old Town*, when they visit Leeds, Birmingham, London, Glasgow, Manchester and Newcastle in May 2025.

The tour will feature original members James Fearnley, Jem Finer, and Spider Stacy along with some special guests.

Released in 1985 and produced by Elvis Costello, *Rum Sodomy & The Lash* is the second studio album by the London-based Irish folk-punks.

In a statement, The Pogues said: "After the uproarious bash which was the 40th anniversary of our first record, *Red Roses For Me*, in 2024, we wanted to do it again, but with *Rum Sodomy & The Lash.*"

In May 2024, a host of special guest singers stood in for the late Shane MacGowan in a raucous run-through of the band's debut LP at London's Hackney Empire, before a final pre-Christmas show at Dublin's 3Arena on 17 December.

For tickets and further information, visit www.pogues.com

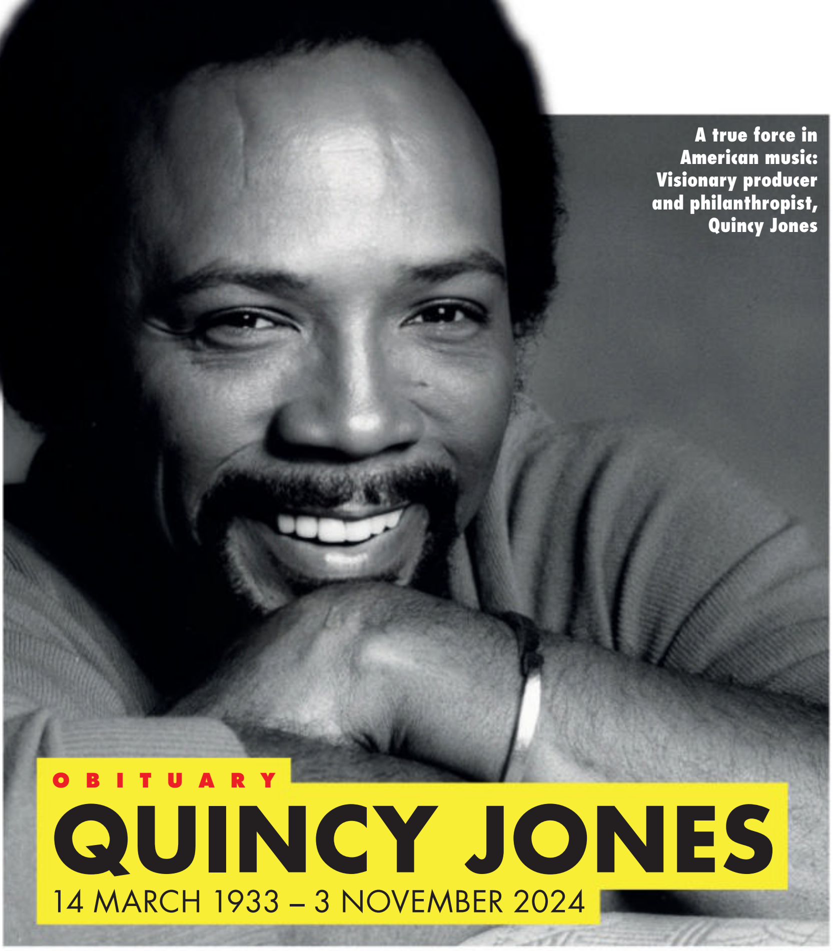
© Albert Sanchez

Heaven-sent Belinda gigs

Belinda Carlisle has announced four headline UK dates as part of her Heavenly Hits tour.

The former Go-Go's frontwoman begins at Edinburgh Usher Hall on 9 September, followed by shows at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall (10), London's Eventim Apollo (12) and Manchester's O2 Apollo (13). For the last two dates, support comes from Fine Young Cannibals' Roland Gift.

For more details, visit alttickets.com or Belinda's official Facebook page.



A true force in American music: Visionary producer and philanthropist, Quincy Jones

OBITUARY

QUINCY JONES

14 MARCH 1933 – 3 NOVEMBER 2024

Iconic US producer and musician, Quincy Jones, died on 3 November, aged 91. A statement from Jones' publicist Arnold Robinson revealed that he passed away at his Bel Air home in Los Angeles surrounded by his family.

Born Quincy Delight Jones Jr. in Chicago, Illinois, in 1933, during a career that spanned seven decades, Jones worked with esteemed stars such as Frank Sinatra, Little Richard, Ella Fitzgerald and Aretha Franklin. But it was his influence on the Michael Jackson albums *Off The Wall* (1979), 1982's *Thriller* and its follow-up five years later, *Bad*, that established him as one of the most prominent producers in the industry.

In 1985, together with Jackson and Lionel Richie, Jones was a driving force behind USA For Africa's charity single *We Are The World*. The US equivalent to Band Aid's *Do They Know It's Christmas?*, the song raised more than $60 million for African famine relief, and was covered in the recent Netflix documentary *The Greatest Night In Pop*.

Jones received the first of seven Academy Award nominations for his score to 1967's *In Cold Blood*. Further Academy recognition included his work on *The Eyes Of Love*, *For Love Of Ivy*, *The Wiz* and *The Color Purple*. Other accolades received during his career included 28 Grammy Awards (with 80 nominations), a Primetime Emmy Award, and a Tony.

Jones also worked on several television shows, producing *The Fresh Prince Of Bel-Air* in the 90s.

Among the many stars paying tribute to Jones were Stevie Wonder, Nile Rodgers, LL Cool J, Sir Elton John, Celine Dion and Sir Paul McCartney.

CHINA CRISIS ANNOUNCE 2025 TOUR

China Crisis have unveiled a 17-date 2025 tour to mark the 40th anniversary of their classic studio album, *Flaunt The Imperfection*.

Beginning in Toronto on 22 February, the band then return to the UK for dates that include Shrewsbury Abbey on 11 April, Queen's Hall in Edinburgh on 8 May and a hometown show at Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall on 24 May.

Fronted by Gary Daly and Eddie Lundon, the band are set to perform their much-loved third studio album in full. The 1985 Walter Becker-produced *Flaunt The Imperfection* LP featured the hits *Black Man Ray* and *King In A Catholic Style*. The band also promise further hits from their back catalogue plus a few near misses.

1 HIT WONDER

Maria Vidal
BODY ROCK

BODY ROCK

MARIA VIDAL

It wasn't uncommon in the 80s for films that tanked to still be blessed with a decent soundtrack, and *Body Rock*, a breakdance movie in an oversubscribed market, was a prime example. Florida singer Maria Vidal, a long-time associate of songwriter-to-the-stars Desmond Child, was asked to record the track while working on her first solo album. Defining all good titular soundtrack songs, it had a mighty chorus that was catchy enough to make people sing it the moment the movie's name was mentioned. It featured on a soundtrack album with many star turns, amongst them Roberta Flack and Laura Branigan. Co-written by Carpenters' lyricist John Bettis, the song was issued as a single in conjunction with the movie's release in the US autumn of 1984, and made only minor inroads into the Billboard Hot 100 as critics pelted the movie with rotten fruit. It fared much better in Europe over the next 12 months, and with the movie out of the equation and Vidal's powerful, throaty vocals earning praise, it became a UK radio staple in late 1985, peaking at No.11 and earning a place on *Now 6*. Vidal's solo album belatedly emerged in 1987 but *Body Rock* was, unsurprisingly, not included. She continued to release music but became mainly known as a backing singer and composer – her work included two 1990s hit singles for Belinda Carlisle.

MATTHEW RUDD IS THE HOST OF FORGOTTEN 80s ON ABSOLUTE 80s

ABC

the Lexicon of Love

ABC perform the classic album in its entirety plus their greatest hits, accompanied by The Lexicon Sinfonia orchestra. Conducted by Anne Dudley.

October 2025

30 **BOURNEMOUTH** *IC*
31 **CARDIFF** *Utilita Arena*

November 2025

01 **BRIGHTON** *Centre*
03 **BIRMINGHAM** *Symphony Hall*
04 **SOUTHEND** *Cliffs Pavilion*
06 **NOTTINGHAM** *Royal Concert Hall*
07 **SHEFFIELD** *City Hall*
09 **LONDON** *Palladium*
10 **LONDON** *Palladium*
13 **NEWCASTLE** *O2 City Hall*
14 **GLASGOW** *Armadillo*
15 **EDINBURGH** *Usher Hall*
17 **LIVERPOOL** *Philharmonic*
20 **BATH** *Forum*
21 **MANCHESTER** *O2 Apollo*
22 **BLACKPOOL** *Opera House*

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AN S.J.M. CONCERTS PRESENTATION

Flower power: Hothouse Flowers will focus on two of their cornerstone LPs when they next play live in the UK

© Nico Wills

HOTHOUSE FLOWERS

Q+A

THE DUBLIN SOUL BAND WILL BE BRINGING THE UNIQUE MAGIC OF THEIR LIVE SHOWS – AND THEIR FIRST TWO ALBUMS – TO THE UK NEXT SUMMER

JEREMY ALLEN

The late 80s was a whirlwind for Hothouse Flowers. 1988's *People* reached No.2 in the UK and was the most successful debut album in Irish history, propelled by infectious singalongs such as Top 20 single *Don't Go*.

Classic Pop caught up with guitarist Fiachna Ó Braonáin to talk about their debut and its much-fêted follow-up *Home*, studio LPs they'll be performing over here next year.

Are you looking forward to next summer's live shows?
Very much so. It's been heartwarming to see the response across the board to the announcement. People who've been with us over the years are very excited to see us playing in venues like the Kentish Town Forum which, of course, was the Town And Country Club. Probably some of our very first gigs in London in the 80s were in the Town And Country Club, and we recorded the video for *I'm Sorry* there, so it holds a lot of warm memories.

Why have you chosen to concentrate on the *People* and *Home* LPs?
They're the cornerstones around which we're hanging the tour, but every night will be full of surprises because we've been playing with no setlist for many years now. There are risks taken and the audience is in on it. There is something special and valuable about just being in the moment.

That's kind of how you started out, wasn't it?
Yeah, it taps into the risks that we took busking where we'd make stuff up, and we used to play in clubs in Dublin and our sets were very groove-oriented and improvised. In those early days, we didn't have much material, so we'd make it up on the spot. And I suppose the spirit of that energy is still with us. There's a constant musical dialogue going back and forth between the musicians on the stage.

Is that what caught the eye of Bono, who signed you to Mother Records originally?
We were playing at the aptly named Risk nightclub in Dublin, and Bono and the U2 guys all used to come down. We busked on Grafton Street and the girl who managed the place invited us, and we ended up having this little circus where we'd play, very often just myself and Liam [Ó Maonlaí] on guitar and piano, and other buskers or musicians would sit in and do a blues song or whatever. Sunday night is a quiet night in any city centre, so in order to attract people, it has to be something a bit special. We used to do our own songs and also soul covers like *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*, so that genre of music impacted our music as well.

> "EVERY NIGHT WILL BE FULL OF SURPRISES BECAUSE WE'VE BEEN PLAYING WITH NO SETLIST FOR MANY YEARS"

Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments* came out around the same time as you did. Was there a soul scene in Dublin?
The Commitments very much captured that soul thing. I remember somebody said to me: 'Oh, Roddy Doyle must have seen you guys play.' I don't know if that's true or not, I've never asked him, but I wouldn't be surprised, because we were playing around town a lot at that time. In fact, Maria Doyle Kennedy who was in *The Commitments* was singing with Hothouse Flowers as well back then, so chances are that there was some level of inspiration there.

You also performed with Shane MacGowan and Sinéad O'Connor, who we sadly lost last year, didn't you?
Yes, they were two huge losses, and we knew them both well. We'd performed with them on various occasions over the years. When I think back to that period, I was literally unaware of the world and just focusing on music and having a great time. And Sinéad was completely aware of what was going on with the Catholic Church in Ireland and humanitarian issues. People said she was mad because of some of the opinions she had that have subsequently proven to be spot on. She was an incredibly bright, amazing woman.

What do you remember about 1988? Did you stop for long enough to enjoy it?
We savoured every moment. The band were all in our early 20s and always delighted to get on a plane and go off and do a TV show, a radio show, a gig, or a tour. After a couple of years, I suppose it became a bit of a grind – there were no mobile phones, so we were very much in our own bubble, and the ability to remain in touch with home and with friends just wasn't there. I look back on it now with great fondness, with lots of great adventures and lots of great shows. The energy we were given by the audiences propelled us along, and that still remains the case. And what a privilege that is. ■

● Hothouse Flowers tour the UK from 6-13 June 2025. For more details, visit hothouseflowers.com.

★★★★★ 'Perfect in just about every way' THE TIMES

THE AUSTRALIAN PINK FLOYD SHOW

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SATURDAY 18 OCTOBER
BOURNEMOUTH
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
MON 20 OCT & MON 17 NOV
BIRMINGHAM
SYMPHONY HALL
TUESDAY 21 OCTOBER
BRISTOL BEACON
WEDNESDAY 22 OCTOBER
SHEFFIELD CITY HALL
FRIDAY 24 OCTOBER
ABERDEEN P&J LIVE
SATURDAY 25 OCTOBER
EDINBURGH USHER HALL
SUNDAY 26 OCTOBER
LIVERPOOL EMPIRE
TUESDAY 28 OCTOBER
OXFORD NEW THEATRE

WEDNESDAY 29 OCTOBER
LEICESTER
DE MONTFORT HALL
FRIDAY 31 OCTOBER
CAMBRIDGE
CORN EXCHANGE
SUN 02 & MON 03 NOVEMBER
LONDON PALLADIUM
THURSDAY 06 NOVEMBER
HULL CONNEXIN LIVE
FRIDAY 07 NOVEMBER
STOCKTON GLOBE
SATURDAY 08 NOVEMBER
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MONDAY 10 NOVEMBER
YORK BARBICAN
TUESDAY 11 NOVEMBER
NOTTINGHAM
ROYAL CONCERT HALL
WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER
CARDIFF UTILITA ARENA
FRIDAY 14 NOVEMBER
PLYMOUTH PAVILIONS

SATURDAY 15 NOVEMBER
PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL
TUESDAY 18 NOVEMBER
STOKE REGENT THEATRE
WEDNESDAY 19 NOVEMBER
LLANDUDNO
VENUE CYMRU
FRIDAY 21 NOVEMBER
BLACKPOOL
OPERA HOUSE
SATURDAY 22 NOVEMBER
MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
SUNDAY 23 NOVEMBER
NEWCASTLE O2 CITY HALL
TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER
GUILDFORD G LIVE
WEDNESDAY 26 NOVEMBER
BATH FORUM
FRIDAY 28 NOVEMBER
BRIGHTON CENTRE
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SWANSEA ARENA

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people

hothouse flowers
Home

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NEWCASTLE 02 CITY HALL
WEDNESDAY 11 JUNE SOLD OUT
BRISTOL BEACON
FRIDAY 20 JUNE SOLD OUT
BLACKPOOL OPERA HOUSE
MONDAY 23 JUNE SOLD OUT
LIVERPOOL EMPIRE THEATRE
WEDNESDAY 25 JUNE SOLD OUT
LONDON ROYAL ALBERT HALL
FRIDAY 27 JUNE SOLD OUT
WOLVERHAMPTON
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MONDAY 30 JUNE SOLD OUT
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FRIDAY 04 JULY
OXFORD NEW THEATRE
SATURDAY 05 JULY
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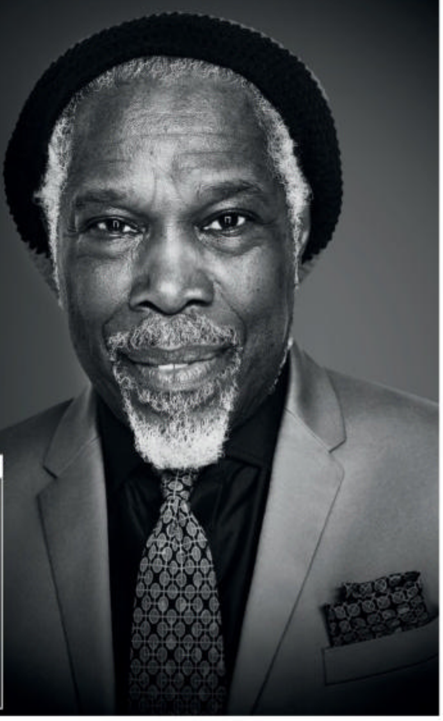

HOLLY JOHNSON

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WELCOME TO
THE
PLEASUREDOME

UK TOUR 2025

WEDNESDAY 28 MAY
PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL
SATURDAY 31 MAY
SOUTHEND CLIFFS PAVILION
TUESDAY 03 JUNE
SHEFFIELD CITY HALL

FRIDAY 06 JUNE
BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
MONDAY 09 JUNE
LONDON
ROYAL AL RT
SOLD OUT
THURSDAY 12 JUNE
BATH
SOLD OUT

SUNDAY 15 JUNE
NEWCASTLE O2 CITY HALL
WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE
GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL
SATURDAY 21 JUNE
LIVERPOOL M&S BANK ARENA

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AN **SJM CONCERTS & AEG PRESENTS** BY ARRANGEMENT WITH **NEIL O'BRIEN ENTERTAINMENT** PRESENTATION

Annie Lennox's first headline show since 2019 will raise funds for global feminist organisation The Circle

© Robert Sebree

ANNIE LENNOX SET TO HEADLINE ROYAL ALBERT HALL CHARITY SHOW

The inaugural SISTERS: Annie Lennox & Friends concert will be held at London's Royal Albert Hall during Women's History Month next year.

Named after the Eurythmics and Aretha Franklin's 1985 feminist anthem *Sisters Are Doin' It For Themselves*, the special event is supporting The Circle, a charity organisation which raises funds to help women and girls facing violence and injustice across the world.

Marking Annie Lennox's first headline show in the UK since 2019, the concert takes place on 6 March and will come two days ahead of International Women's Day.

Lennox, founder of The Circle, said: "I am delighted to be headlining [the event]. The money raised will go to The Circle NGO, a global feminist organisation that I founded back in 2008. Millions of women and girls globally are facing increased oppression, while shockingly, one in three will face violence in their lifetime. I am proud to be part of an event that will make a vital difference to women worldwide who are striving for safety, gender equality and justice. The need has never been greater or more urgent. It's going to be an inspirational occasion."

Further details of the fundraising concert, including the full line-up, will be revealed later – log on to www.royalalberthall.com for details. For more information about The Circle, visit www.thecircle.ngo.

THE FARM ARE BACK IN CONTROL

Baggy favourites The Farm are back with their first studio album since 1994's *Hullabaloo*.

Buoyed by the reaction to their return to frontline music and well-received Leftfield Stage set at this year's Glastonbury, the band's fourth studio LP, *Let The Music (Take Control)* will be released on 2 May 2025 via Modern Sky.

Rehearsals for live shows in 2024 inspired the Liverpool five-piece to head back into the studio for a new album helmed by producer Mike Cave (The Charlatans, Bloc Party).

Frontman Peter Hooton explains: "When I first heard the new [material] in rehearsals, I knew I had to match the infectious nature of the music, so went for lyrics that aim straight between the eyes – the theme of everlasting love. [The new album is] about love, obsession and infatuation."

"We were listening to some cool dance tracks and liked the feel of them at 126bpm," continues guitarist and keyboard player, Steve Grimes. "We started using a couple of Apple Loops beats in that style, added a keys melody and chords from a previous track. Keith played the guitar chords in the Nile Rodgers style."

Let The Music (Take Control) is available on standard and special edition vinyl, CD and digital.

LOST & FOUND

Shakatak
down on the street

DOWN ON THE STREET
SHAKATAK

Shakatak's breezy, multi-tracked jazz funk took a different direction in 1984 with the release of *Down On The Street*, their fifth album.

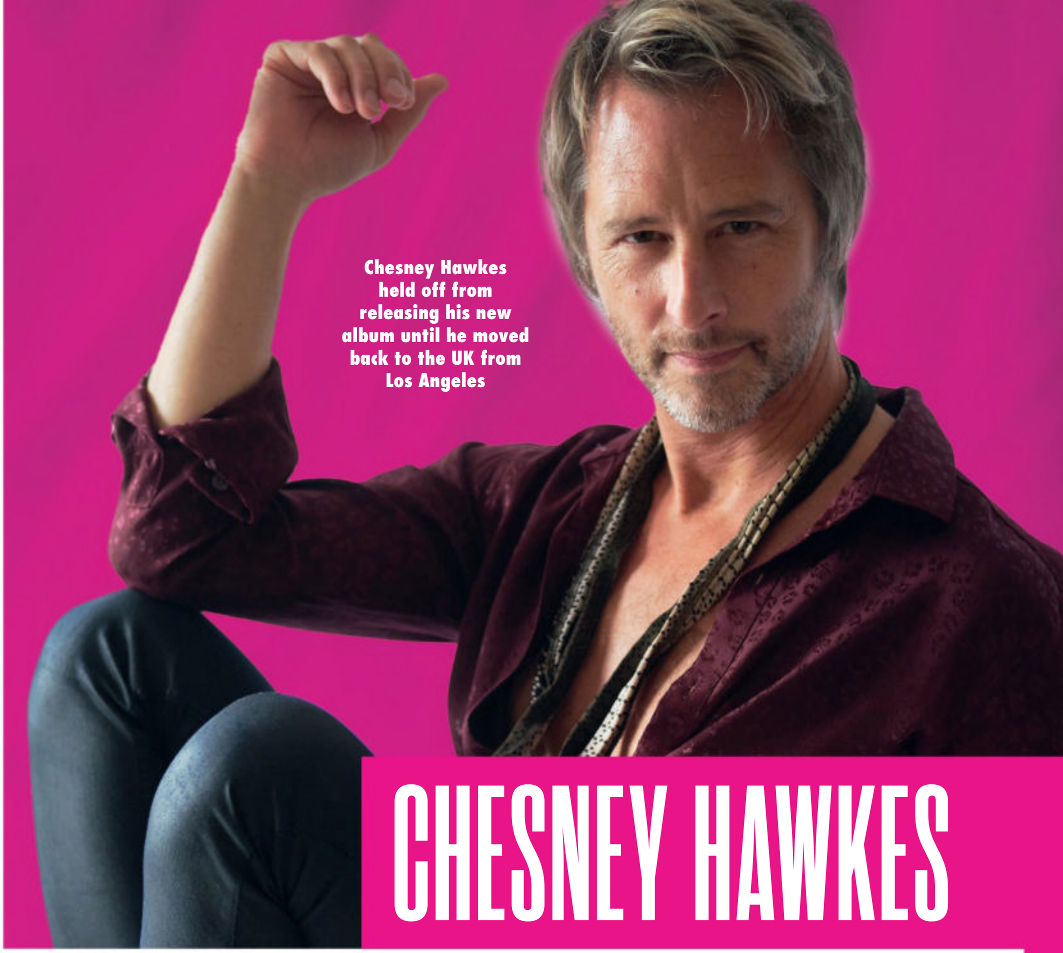
So far lauded for their harmonised vocal hooks interspersed with long instrumental sections, they shed a singer in order to give Jill Saward more of the spotlight.

With Saward on ecstatic form as a free-singing leading lady under the glitterball, the title track gave them a second Top 10 hit, two years after their first. She is also thrust forward on follow-up single *Don't Blame It On Love* and delivers the album's best chorus with gusto on *Watching You*.

Saward's sensitivity impresses on the lilting *Holding On*, torch song *Photograph* and closing Billie Holiday tribute, *Lady*, the latter of which features a rare keyboard solo from Bill Sharpe. Prominent but less dominant than on previous albums, he also keeps some of the band's traditions alive with starring roles in *Fire Dance* and *Summer Sky*, while guitarist Keith Winter takes charge on *Hypnotised*, the LP's only instrumental. Three different saxophonists also make significant contributions to the album.

The musicianship throughout is phenomenal and the LP made the UK Top 20 in 1984's super-competitive market. Despite their work sometimes being written off as 'Teletext music', Shakatak maintain a mammoth, devoted fanbase worldwide and have now made 34 albums. Five members remain in place going back to 1980-81 and they still tour and record regularly.

MATTHEW RUDD



Chesney Hawkes held off from releasing his new album until he moved back to the UK from Los Angeles

CHESNEY HAWKES

Q+A

THIRTY-THREE YEARS ON FROM *THE ONE AND ONLY*, CHESNEY HAWKES IS BACK WITH A NEW ALBUM AND A VERY BOLD MUSIC VIDEO...

STEVE O'BRIEN

In 1991, there were few teen stars bigger than Chesney Hawkes. But since breaking through with the No.1-charting, Nik Kershaw-penned *The One And Only*, the singer has released just five albums, with his sixth long-player, *Living Arrows*, about to hit the shelves. "It's taken a long time to feel confident enough to really throw myself back into a project," the one-time pin-up tells us about his long-awaited comeback.

It's been 12 years since your last studio album, *Real Life Love*. Why now?
For those 12 years, I was in L.A. and busy bringing up kids. I had this album in my mind since before Covid, but I felt like it's such a personal record and so English that I didn't want to be over there when I put it out. I knew we were coming back to the UK to live at some point, and just wanted to be on home soil, back in the motherland, before releasing anything.

Though there are rock flavours on the album, it's still very pop. Is that the songwriting tradition you come from?
My songwriting background is still The Beatles, Stevie Wonder, Elvis Costello and David Bowie, slightly old-school. But [on *Living Arrows*] I collaborated with a guy called Jake Gosling, who's worked with Ed Sheeran and Lady Gaga and One Direction, so I feel like he took my traditional songwriting ways and brought a fresh commercial feel to it, production-wise.

And you're working with Nik Kershaw again on the new album...
On three songs, I think. I always say there are two types of people in this world – Nik Kershaw fans and people that should be Nik Kershaw fans. He's one of my besties. We've written hundreds of songs together over the years. There are so many little tricks and fun things that he does naturally that I've just gone, 'oh, I'm taking that.' He's such a mentor to me.

The video for the first single off the album, *Get A Hold Of Yourself*, has you dancing naked around a British stately home. That's a brave thing to do in your fifties.
The song is very much about freedom of self-expression, when you get to a certain age and you've overcome adversities in life, and realising you don't give a shit what anyone else thinks, that it's okay to be you as long as you've got your moral compass in the right place. So I wanted to do something bold and brave to reflect that, and then I saw [the movie] *Saltburn*. You may have seen it, the lead character prancing around, swinging in the wind, totally naked, free as anything, and just liberated. It clicked something in me, and so when we were looking to do a video, I kept coming back to it. I brought it to the team, and they were like, "You're fucking mad, you realise that you're 52!?" I did ask my manager if I'd get the piss ripped out of me, because I do have a slightly dad bod.

So did you have time to hit the gym before filming?
We only had a week to get this together so I wasn't able to make myself look like Ryan Gosling! My wife was very supportive, she came along to the video shoot. And my kids were hilarious – they were like, "Oh, it's just dad doing his midlife crisis thing!"

> "I'VE HAD THIS ALBUM IN MY MIND SINCE BEFORE COVID – IT'S A PERSONAL RECORD AND SO ENGLISH"

***The One And Only* is still the song you're best remembered for. It's an incredibly catchy track – do you ever find yourself humming it around the house or in the shower?**
I've got a very high radar for that song. Listen, I'm a music consumer, and I do get stuff stuck in my head, so I am always wandering around singing. I often wake up with a song in my head, and wonder, 'where did that come from this morning?' Today, I've been singing *Oliver's Army* all day. But if *The One And Only* gets in my head, I'm like, 'Get away!' Just the other day I was in a hotel, walking down a corridor, and *The One And Only* started playing through the speakers, and I thought, 'Great hotel, shit choice in music!'

You've had big gaps between albums before. Do you think it'll be another 12-year wait until LP number seven?
I've already started thinking about the next album. This particular gap was a little bit different because of where I was in life with the kids and moving to L.A. and concentrating on writing and producing for other people, and stuff like that. But now I definitely have the bug again. Hearing the single being played on Radio 2 was really emotional for me. I'm ashamed to say I shed a tear. Hearing Scott Mills saying, "New music from Chesney Hawkes!", it just took me back to 1991 and hearing *The One And Only* on the radio for the first time. ■

- ***Living Arrows*** **is released on 28 February 2025 and will be reviewed in Issue 92**

Ian Peel's A to Z of POP

SOME ARTISTS HAVE IT AND SOME DON'T. THERE ARE THE GREAT LYRICISTS AND THERE ARE GREAT PERFORMERS. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO GREAT BETWEEN-SONG BANTER, IT'S ANOTHER MATTER ENTIRELY...

B IS FOR... BETWEEN-SONG BANTER

I've seen OMD play at the Royal Albert Hall a couple of times and it's quite a sight to behold. But, having missed their March 2022 Atmospherics & Greatest Hits set, I've been listening back to the live recording on Spotify. The group are strong: Martin Cooper's bass on *Julia's Song* and Stuart Kershaw's drums on *The Romance Of The Telescope* being particular highlights.

What also struck me was just how great Andy McCluskey is at between-song banter. "Just because it's the Albert Hall, don't be dignified," he says before *Messages*, trying to get the crowd off their seats and onto their feet. He was still cajoling them a few songs later over the intro to *So In Love*: "Are you so worried about dropping your phone, you don't want to dance?!"

The one that made me laugh out loud was when they were coming out of a beautiful obscurities set – that took in *Almost*, *Statues* and *Stanlow* – ready for a dance-around-your-handbags section kicking off with *History Of Modern (Part 1)* over which Andy shouted "You've had the crackers, now here's the cheese!"

I guess the origin of this artform-within-an-artform came from John Lennon when The Beatles performed – in front of the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret (and alongside Marlene Dietrich, no less) – at the Royal Variety Performance in November 1963. You know what's coming... "For our last number, I'd like to ask your help," Lennon said. "The people in the cheaper seats, clap your hands. And the rest of you, if you'd just rattle your jewellery."

Perhaps the guru of between-song banter is Peter Gabriel. His largely psychedelic stories at early Genesis gigs – with titles such as 'Thomas S. Eiselberg And His Onions', 'Henry And Cynthia On The Croquet Pitch' and 'Five Rivers With One Dirty Mouth' – are the stuff of legend. They're so important to the music history books that they've inspired their own podcast called *The Napping Wizard Sessions*.

"PERHAPS THE GURU OF BETWEEN-SONG BANTER IS PETER GABRIEL. HIS LARGELY PSYCHEDELIC STORIES – WITH TITLES SUCH AS 'THOMAS S. EISELBERG AND HIS ONIONS' – ARE THE STUFF OF LEGEND.

While I never had the chance to witness them first-hand, I have seen Gabriel post-Genesis live on two occasions, the first being the breathtaking Growing Up tour at Wembley Arena in 2003.

His between-song banter that night was still impressive, if short by comparison to Genesis standards, and it turned me on to one of the new tracks he was playing. I really hadn't gelled with the *Up* album's debut single *The Barry Williams Show* despite its lyrical tirade against the wave of Jerry Springer-style TV that was starting to take over our lives at the time. But it made a lot more sense when he explained it over the opening chords: "If you think about our composition, what we're made up of... It used to be said that 'we are what we eat'. And then people, maybe a little more fashion-conscious, would say, 'No, you are what you wear'. Others would say, 'You are what you read'. But I would say – in this millennium – 'You are what you watch' and what we watch is... *The Barry Williams Show*."

A master at work. But maybe the last word on between-song banter should go to Lennon. "Rattle your jewellery" was there at the start of The Beatles' career and, as the last notes of their final live show faded on the rooftop of the Apple building, he was ready with another one-liner. "I'd like to say thank you on behalf of the group and ourselves. And I hope we've passed the audition." ■

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THE SELECTER

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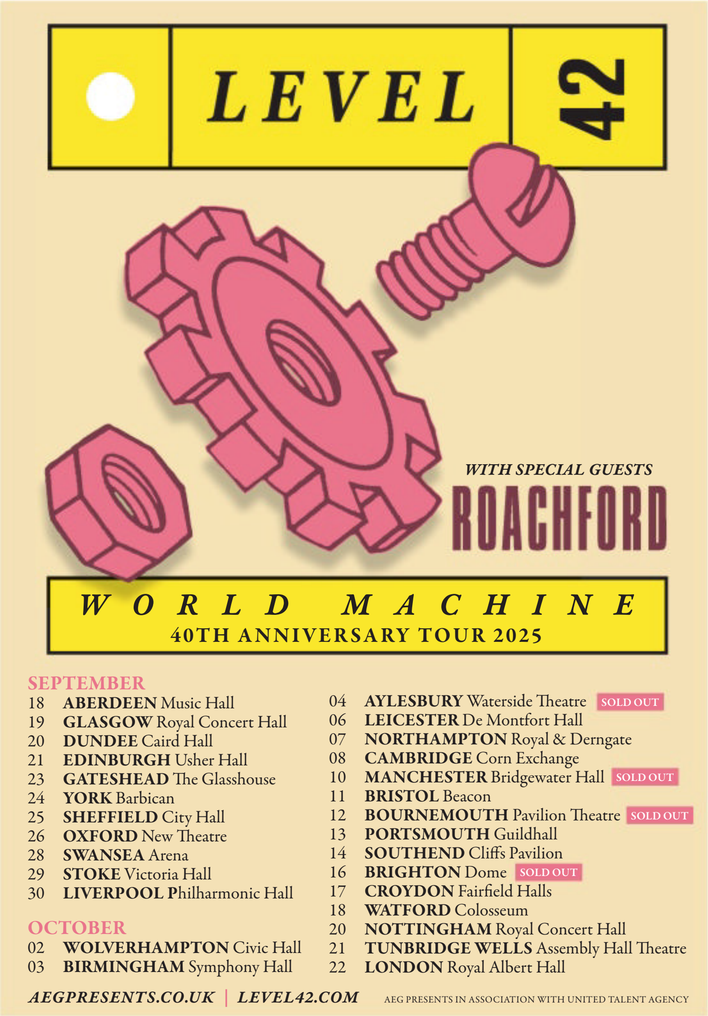

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23 **GATESHEAD** The Glasshouse
24 **YORK** Barbican
25 **SHEFFIELD** City Hall
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28 **SWANSEA** Arena
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30 **LIVERPOOL** Philharmonic Hall

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02 **WOLVERHAMPTON** Civic Hall
03 **BIRMINGHAM** Symphony Hall
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This month in POP

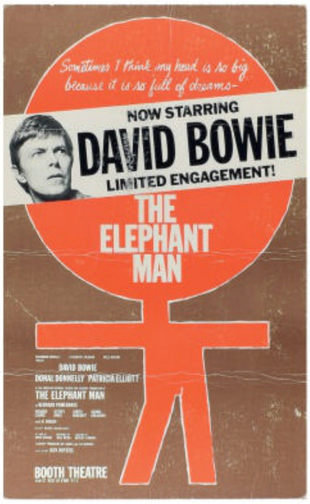
JANUARY 1981

BLONDIE SECURE THEIR THIRD BILLBOARD NO.1 SINGLE, SHEENA EASTON UNVEILS HER DEBUT ALBUM, BOWIE ENDS HIS RUN ON BROADWAY AND POSTHUMOUS JOHN LENNON RELEASES MAKE THEIR WAY UP THE CHARTS

STEVE O'BRIEN

01 Kate Bush, who had released her third studio album *Never For Ever* a few months previously in September 1980, is voted Best Female Artist in Capital Radio's listener's poll.

25 Alicia Keys is born in New York City. In 2008, she co-writes *Another Way To Die* with Jack White, the theme song to the James Bond movie *Quantum Of Solace*.


Sometimes I think my head is so big because it is so full of dreams–
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LIMITED ENGAGEMENT!
THE ELEPHANT MAN
DAVID BOWIE
DONAL DONNELLY PATRICIA ELLIOTT
THE ELEPHANT MAN
BOOTH THEATRE

03 David Bowie makes his final appearance on stage at New York City's Booth Theatre as John Merrick, aka the Elephant Man, in the Bernard Pomerance play based on the life of Joseph Merrick.

Echo and the Bunnymen
'Shine So Hard'
An Atlas Adventure

09 Terry Hall and Jerry Dammers from The Specials are fined £400 each after being charged with incitement to riot during a gig by the ska band in Cambridge.

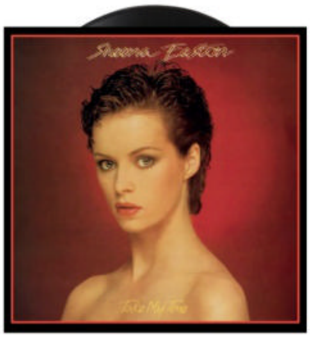
16 Nick Valensi, the future lead and rhythm guitarist in US indie band The Strokes, is born in New York City.

31 Blondie hit the summit of the Billboard Hot 100 with *The Tide Is High*, the group's third No.1 single in the United States. The song was also a chart-topper in the UK.

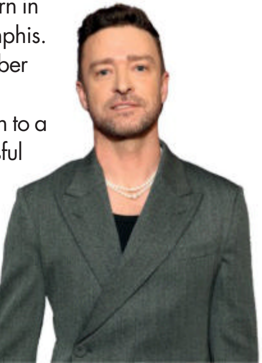
17 Echo And The Bunnymen play a secret gig at the Pavilion Gardens in Buxton, Derbyshire. The show is released as an EP a few months later under the title *Shine So Hard*.

15 Marvin Gaye releases his 16th studio album, *In Our Lifetime*. It would be the singer's final LP for the Motown label before leaving for Columbia Records.

19 Sheena Easton releases her debut studio album, *Take My Time*. It includes the hit single *Modern Girl*.


Sheena Easton
Take My Time

31 Justin Timberlake is born in Memphis. A former member of *NSYNC, he has gone on to a hugely successful solo career.



10

Following the shocking death of John Lennon, who was murdered in New York City on 8 December 1980, a reissue of *Imagine* started a four-week run at No.1 on the UK Singles Chart.

Originally waxed 10 years previous for his 1971 album of the same name, *Imagine* remains Lennon's signature solo song. Co-written with his wife Yoko Ono, the track posits a world without materialism, religion or war ("Imagine no possessions/ I wonder if you can/ No need for greed or hunger/ A brotherhood of man") and was, according to Ono, speaking to *Rolling Stone* in 2001: "Just what John believed, that we are all one country, one world, one people."

It's that universality which has made *Imagine* one of the most performed numbers of all time, and why it was selected among the 500 tracks that made it into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame's list of the 'Songs That Shaped Rock and Roll'. It regularly appears in best-ever lists (in *Rolling Stone*'s 2024 rundown of the 500 Greatest Songs Of All Time, it was No.19), and has been covered over the years by artists as diverse as Madonna, Stevie Wonder, Joan Baez, Dolly Parton, Lady Gaga, Elton John, Diana Ross and, perhaps most memorably (though we'd like to forget it), *Wonder Woman* actor Gal Gadot and various celebrity friends. It was also sung by Lennon's son Julian in 2022 for Global Citizen's Stand Up For Ukraine awareness campaign.

In 1981, the outpouring of grief over John's sudden and untimely passing also sent *Happy Xmas (War Is Over)* and *(Just Like) Starting Over* into the Top 5 of the UK hit parade, at No.2 and No.5 respectively.

Lennon's joint album with Yoko, *Double Fantasy*, also made it to No.1 on the US albums chart for eight weeks while *(Just Like) Starting Over* topped Billboard's Hot 100 singles list.

TOP 5 UK ALBUMS CHART

11 JANUARY 1981

❶ **SUPER TROUPER**
ABBA

ABBA
Super Trouper

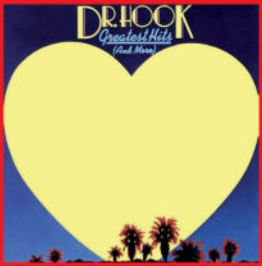
❷ **DOUBLE FANTASY**
JOHN LENNON & YOKO ONO

John Lennon
Double Fantasy
Yoko Ono

❸ **KINGS OF THE WILD FRONTIER**
ADAM & THE ANTS

ADAM AND THE ANTS
KINGS OF THE WILD FRONTIER

❹ **GREATEST HITS**
DR. HOOK



❺ **THE BEST OF BOWIE**
DAVID BOWIE

THE BEST OF
Bowie

BAND AID at 40

"EVERYONE RECOGNISED THERE WAS A HIGHER CAUSE – AND YOU DON'T OFTEN GET THAT IN POP MUSIC"

AS THE FIFTH BAND AID RECORDING CELEBRATES PREVIOUS INCARNATIONS OF *DO THEY KNOW IT'S CHRISTMAS?*, ITS CREATOR TREVOR HORN EXPLAINS THE THRILL OF MERGING SO MANY GREAT ARTISTS TOGETHER. MEANWHILE, MIDGE URE TELLS US THE FULL STORY OF HOW THE ORIGINAL SONG CAME TO BE – INCLUDING HIS SHOCK AT HOW LITTLE HE REALLY KNEW WHEN ITS LONG-LOST DEMO WAS UNEARTHED.

JOHN EARLS

FEED THE
WORLD
'Do They Know It's Christmas?'
BAND AID

© Brian Aris/Band Aid

Boy George flew in on Concorde from New York to join Band Aid organiser Bob Geldof for the November 1984 recording session of *Do They Know It's Christmas?*

When Midge Ure published his autobiography, *If I Was*, 20 years ago, he was keen to stress that his memory may have misled him at times, even in his own life story. "I didn't want to upset anybody," he tells *Classic Pop* from his home studio. "They were just my recollections – honest, but possibly inaccurate at times, because everyone remembers every story differently."

This idea of false memory was brought home to Band Aid's co-founder when the head of his record label, Chrysalis, found the demo of *Do They Know It's Christmas?* while searching for unheard music to put on the reissue of Ure's debut solo album *The Gift* last year.

Recorded "at my kitchen table on my toy keyboard", it's emotional for *CP* to hear the demo, let alone Midge Ure, when it turned up after 39 years. The demo was lost partly because Ure had written the title of another song on the cassette.

It's so basic that you can hear Ure try out different counter-melodies. There's certainly no hint of the song building to its "Feed the world" climax. But the main melody is right there, a piece of classic 80s iconography even in the demo's tinny-sounding state. It's what Ure calls "My *Z-Cars* theme", after Bob Geldof's initial response on hearing the demo was that it sounded like the title music to the 60s police drama.

It's what you'd expect from a first demo. It isn't, however, what Ure had expected to hear. "I was stunned when I first heard that demo again," he admits. "I had no recollection of doing it. My memory was that, as soon as I sat down with that keyboard, I instantly came up with the song – and it's blatantly obvious from the demo that that's not the case."

Instead, as Ure describes: "It meanders all over the place. I was trying a variety of different things for the song. You can hear there are obvious bits I'm honing in on. The weird way I write music is that the songwriting and production are all one process. To me, music, lyrics, melody, counter-melody: they're all as important as each other. Hearing that lost recording was such an eye-opener for me."

Ure was shocked that *Do They Know It's Christmas?* had such a basic demo because it's well-known that he and Bob Geldof only had four days to write it in. And with Geldof understandably determined to persuade as many A-list popstars as possible to appear on Band Aid, it was left to Ure to actually get the song into shape.

On song: (L-R) Bob Geldof's right-hand man Midge Ure, Spandau Ballet's Gary Kemp and U2 frontman Bono

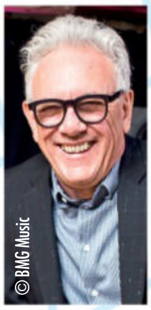
© Brian Aris/Band Aid

"I HAD THE MASSIVE TASK OF TURNING BOB'S BIZARRE RAMBLINGS INTO A COHERENT SONG TO WORK WITH MY Z-CARS THEME"

MIDGE URE

As Ure puts it: "While Bob had the massive task of doing the persuading, I had the massive task of turning Bob's bizarre ramblings into a coherent song to work with my *Z-Cars* theme. I didn't have time to wander down King's Road to have lunch with whoever happened to be passing to ask them onto our song. I was manacled to the desk."

That Ure was able to create such a classic is a Christmas miracle. It's a song that's survived Band Aid II, Band Aid 20 and Band Aid 30, each with a new generation of pop talent bringing their own contemporary twist, respectively produced by Stock Aitken Waterman, Nigel Godrich and Paul Epworth.



© BMG Music

Trevor Horn was tasked with giving *Do They Know It's Christmas?* its latest refresh for Band Aid 40

MIXING THE ERAS

Rather than get, say, Dua Lipa, Sam Fender and Celeste to cover *Do They Know It's Christmas?* again, for the latest version, Band Aid 40, Trevor Horn was brought in to mix together the single's previous incarnations. It's enabled him to figure out why the song is so adaptable that it can thrive with so many talents putting their own stamp on it. "It's almost like a folk tune," considers Horn. "It's a pretty simple song: it cycles around four chords; F, G, C, and D Minor, while the bridge is A Minor to G. It's the simplicity that makes it.

"There are elements, like the 'It's Christmas time' section, that are pure folk. Charity records can be pretty clunky, and Band Aid was much better than I expected it to be. It was interesting hearing so many people singing on the same song, all singing their own bit. I hadn't heard anything like it."

Ure is more critical of his own composition, insisting: "I'm not so sure it is so adaptable. Look, there are better Christmas songs. I like the

The original cast of Band Aid included nearly 40 of the most successful music stars of the day and the single was the UK's biggest-ever seller at the time

© Brian Aris/Band Aid

© Brian Aris/Band Aid

George Michael (left) and Duran Duran's Nick Rhodes were part of the ensemble

Christmas songs I grew up with, like *Little Donkey,* and Band Aid wouldn't make it into my Top 10 Christmas songs. You can choose so many Christmas songs that are beautifully constructed and have beautiful melodies.

"I've no idea why *Do They Know It's Christmas?* works, but it might be about the social impact it made, as much as the song itself. It could be that we look at the world through rose-tinted glasses to how it was first made. Whatever the reason, it does seem to be a song that people want to reinterpret, and that's great."

As well as merging generations of talent from Boy George to One Direction via Coldplay, Band Aid 40 features elements of BBC1 newsreader Michael Buerk's original report from Ethiopia in 1984, which caused Geldof to first create Band Aid.

"I could give you a complicated answer about featuring the reportage, but the truth is that Bob wanted me to do it," smiles Horn.

By then, Horn had already asked ZTT co-founder Paul Morley what to include. "One of Paul's ideas was: 'Put Michael Buerk in'," says Horn. "Listening back to that report now, what Buerk says is profound."

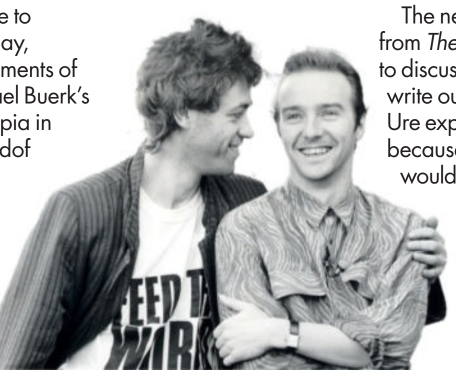
When he first saw Buerk's film, Geldof phoned his wife Paula Yates while she was about to host *The Tube* to say that he wanted to help. Famously, Midge Ure was stood next to Paula.

"If Bob could have chosen anyone to write Band Aid with, he wouldn't have sought me out at all," admits Ure. "From Ultravox, I'd have been too electronic and too stylised for Bob. But, at that moment, I was the only songwriter on the end of that phone."

JOINING FORCES

At least the pair knew each other. "If I hadn't known Bob, I might have said no to being involved," Ure says. "I didn't know what the famine was about. Bob was on the phone straight after the broadcast, so obviously I hadn't had chance to see the report. But I'd known Bob since The Rich Kids, as he'd come to see us in Dublin. We weren't bosom buddies, but I'd had dinner at his place a few times. Everybody knew Bob. If you didn't know him from The Boomtown Rats, you knew him through Paula, who'd interviewed everyone."

The next day, once Ure was back from *The Tube*, he and Geldof met to discuss what to do. "We had to write our own [original] song," Ure explains. "It couldn't be a cover, because otherwise half the royalties would go to the songwriter. And we quickly realised it had to be a Christmas record.



Midge Ure was rehearsing with Ultravox for Channel 4 show *The Tube* when host Paula Yates handed him the phone...

© David Crump, Chris Barham, Daily Mail, Shutterstock

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Although Midge Ure produced and wrote most of *Do They Know It's Christmas?,* Bob Geldof is, of course, the public face of the Band Aid. And that's how Ure likes it.

"Anyone in Bob Geldof's company will be the man in the background," he laughs. "He is larger-than-life, exactly how you see him on television. I get 'Goofy Bob', the slightly geekier version, when I'm with him. Everyone else gets 'Sucked-In Cheeks Bob', the serious 'I know my stuff' Bob."

Ure doesn't think he'd have coped in the spotlight, saying: "It was my natural position to get on with Band Aid's musical side. I'd have been useless talking at the UN, or accosting Margaret Thatcher to demand Band Aid's VAT got covered.

"That was Bob's forte. It elevated him to being seen as a spokesperson for youth and a quasi-politician, whereas I was able to carry on being a working musician. Bob was taken out of that role for a long time, and that wasn't his choice.

"All Bob really wanted to do was get back on stage," adds Ure. "When I played Wembley Arena the year after, Bob sent flowers with a note: 'You lucky bastard! I wish I was you.'"

After just one year, the Band Aid campaign had raised £8 million, dwarfing the £70k target originally set by Bob Geldof

© Brian Aris/Band Aid

© Brian Aris/Band Aid

Midge Ure at the controls in the studio: "I look like a kid who's wandered in off the streets among all these rock stars"

"On a purely fiscal level, Christmas No.1s sold more than a No.1 at any other time of year. *Mull Of Kintyre* was mentioned."

Geldof already had the germ of an idea. Ure recalls: "Before that first meeting, Bob had the structure of something. It was a song the Rats had said no to. In Bob's mind, it just needed a bit of tweaking. I went home from that lunch and came up with the *Z-Cars* bit."

In 2020, Geldof explained to *Classic Pop* that writing *Do They Know It's Christmas?* with Ure was key to his confidence as a songwriter. He had never written a song with anyone away from The Boomtown Rats before and wasn't sure that he could.

"I had very little confidence in myself as a musician," Geldof told us. "When I spoke to Midge, he was having hits and I wasn't. When Midge said he'd do it, he asked if I had a song we could work on. That was normal – just one songwriter talking to another. But I freaked out a bit. Midge told me: 'You write a bit, I'll write a bit, we'll see what comes out.' That assumption I was on the same level as Midge did so much for my confidence."

It's a revelation that shocks Ure, who says: "I'd never thought of it that way, because Bob was always a songwriter to me. Yes, the Rats were on the wane a bit at the time. But, when they were riding high, their stuff was fantastic. Bob wasn't

BAND AID II
Do They Know It's Christmas?

TWO LATE TO FIND

There's one key aspect missing in Trevor Horn's mash-up of the past Band Aid singles: nobody from Band Aid II in 1989 was able to be included.

"Nobody could find the multitrack for the Stock Aitken Waterman version," reveals Horn. "I phoned Midge to get the multitrack of the original Band Aid, and Universal were able to locate them for the 2004 and 2014 versions, but Band Aid II is currently missing."

Band Aid II features the likes of Jason Donovan, Bros, Jimmy Somerville, Cliff Richard, Kylie and Chris Rea. Is there anyone Horn would have loved to include on Band Aid 40 if the tapes had turned up? "When I knew I couldn't have the multitrack, I didn't listen to it," he admits. "Marti Pellow has a great voice. So has Jimmy Somerville, but Marti is more to my own taste. Using him would have been interesting."

Instrumental change: (L-R) Phil Collins at the drum kit, Bob Geldof strums his 12-string and Sting with his bass guitar

© Brian Aris/Band Aid

just some loudmouth, he came up with interesting songs. So I hadn't thought on any level that I was helping him to write."

The pair met for lunch again the next day, this time at Ure's home in Chiswick, West London, where he had recently built a home studio. "Bob played me the song idea he had," Ure remembers. "But, every time he did so, it sounded different. It was quite a malleable idea, but the elements were there.

"Bob then began switching his time between bludgeoning poor artists he met on the King's Road and bludgeoning record companies to do it for free. All of that was imperative, and it let me get on with putting these totally incompatible elements together."

Geldof suggested Trevor Horn should produce Band Aid, but Ure grins: "Trevor takes his time, and time was the one thing not on our side. Trevor is pedantic, and rightly so, because it's why his are some of the best productions ever." Horn totally accepts Ure's view, laughing: "Midge is right, I would have taken too long. I *was* pretty crazy about my output at that time.

"When you listen to the original Band Aid, Midge did a really good job. It's unfair, but a lot of people keep praising me for Midge's work and think I produced it. I have to tell them: 'No, it was Midge Ure, it was just done at my studio.'"

Having recently built his home studio for Ultravox's *Lament* helped shape *Do They Know It's Christmas?*: "I was emotional back-up for Bob, and someone who knew technically what to do," Ure reflects. "Band Aid wouldn't have happened the way it did if I didn't know technically what I was doing. Understanding how to put arrangements together and operating a studio were key to how quickly we turned the song around."

How would *Do They Know It's Christmas?* sound if Bob and Midge had four months to write it, rather than four days? "Bob would have analysed it to death," laughs Ure. "It could have dragged on and had the life beaten out of it. Working against the clock worked out incredibly well."

DOING THEIR BIT

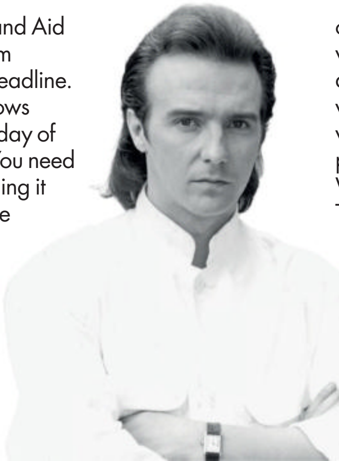
To prepare for Band Aid 40, Ure rewatched the original Band Aid documentary, which made him appreciate the magic of the deadline. He explains: "The footage shows Bob keeps popping in on the day of recording, telling everyone: 'You need to sing it with more emotion. Sing it like this: 'Giiiiive!' And I'm there going: 'For God's sake, Bob, you've got to let them sing it the way they want.' Those singers weren't doing an entire performance. It'd be four words, so let them sing it the way they want."

This is, of course, a contrast to USA For Africa's *We Are The World* in 1985. Midge Ure was as surprised as anyone watching Netflix's recent documentary, *The Greatest Night In Pop*, on how Quincy Jones produced Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie, Stevie Wonder and co.

"USA For Africa was the antithesis of Band Aid," says Ure. "They had weeks to put it together, and they did it brilliantly. They could plan whose voice worked best in that key, who could put the right amount of power into any particular line. Watching that was incredible. The Band Aid documentary is like a *Carry On* movie by comparison. And that's commendable, because Band Aid wouldn't have worked any other way."

"IN TRYING TO WRITE A SONG EVERYONE WOULD GO OUT AND BUY, WE ENDED UP WITH ONE THAT DOESN'T HAVE A CHORUS"

MIDGE URE



***Do They Know It's Christmas?* was cut in 24 hours at Trevor Horn's Sarm West Studios in Notting Hill in November 1984**

While Ure downplays *Do They Know It's Christmas?* as a song, he is understandably proud of how he masterminded pulling it into shape so quickly, saying: "There's a uniqueness to it that neither Bob or I would have done on our own. It doesn't have a normal song structure, it's like no song I'd written before."

That doesn't mean it's something Ure has considered revisiting in terms of its songwriting style, as he adds: "Nothing repeats in Band Aid. Choruses are what I grew up with, that's the structure I know. Yet, in trying to write a song everyone would go out and buy, we ended up with one that doesn't have a chorus.

"It starts quiet, and progresses into a beast at the other end. There's no singalong bit until 'Feed the world' at the very end. To try to keep the song interesting for people all the way through, *Do They Know It's Christmas?* had to morph throughout. The melody has to build and grow, creeping up to hit the point of 'Feed the world.'"

This is, of course, Ure analysing it 40 years on. At the time? "At the end of the fourth day, we hadn't written the 'Feed the world' section. That was an afterthought, through realising we needed something everyone could sing along to.

"I think the beginning of the song is great. The clanging chimes of doom is an ominous, dark, haunting, *miserable* beginning that sets it all up and reflects what we're singing about. But we had to turn that into a joyous singalong Christmas song.

© Brian Aris/Band Aid

"I was totally out of my comfort zone," Paul Weller told Contact Music of Band Aid

Alpha waves: (L-R) Sting, Bono and Simon Le Bon all added memorable lines

© Brian Aris/Band Aid

"Doing that in the space of three-and-a-half minutes is an odd thing to try to pull off. It really works and came together incredibly well, but we had a bunch of talented people to help us."

That Geldof cajoled so many stars together looks even more remarkable now that email and WhatsApp would have made it so much easier. "We didn't speak to any adults," admits Ure. "We only spoke to artists, not managers who could have written down times and dates. Sat outside the studio, we had a moment of not knowing if anyone would come. Everyone was all over the world – Duran and Spandau coming back from their TV show in Germany, Boy George on Concorde. It was a miracle that everyone turned up."

ON BEST BEHAVIOUR

Not only did everyone turn up, they all behaved themselves, too. The single was recorded with the minimum of fuss. "Everyone in pop is incredibly competitive, particularly singers," Horn points out. "Simon Le Bon, Bono, Sting – they were all alpha males in there. But it felt on that day none of that counted. Everyone recognised there was a higher cause – you don't often get that in pop. Nobody was pulling rank, everyone was very malleable."

Horn admits there was a possible ulterior motive for the chilled mood: "Everyone could tell Band Aid was going to be big. If you were on that song, you were going to be a bit of a legend. So you'd best behave and get on with it."

That was another contrast to the powerplays in USA For Africa, as Ure reasons: "Everyone stood behind the mic and sang like angels at Band Aid. That's unlike the American song, where everyone tries to out-sing each other with vocal gymnastics. Ours was the opposite, because we weren't looking for magic moments. Band Aid was: 'We're looking for what *you* do.' They understood the grasp of what they should be doing. They sounded like themselves, not trying to outdo each other."

> "EVERYONE COULD TELL BAND AID WAS GOING TO BE BIG. IF YOU WERE ON THAT SONG, YOU WERE GOING TO BE A BIT OF A LEGEND."
>
> TREVOR HORN

© Alamy

Bob and Midge with their Ivor Novello Awards at the Grosvenor House Hotel, London, in 1985

Despite the sense of community, *Do They Know It's Christmas?* wasn't wholly without problems. Ure recalls: "Seeing the Band Aid footage again also made me realise just how many people were in the control room with me. I look like a rabbit in the headlights, because I was intimidated. I look like a kid who's wandered in off the streets among all these rock stars. We were grateful for them being there, so I wasn't going to kick them out. It was so strange to see all of that again – the chaos, the bewilderment, the enthusiasm."

Of course, magic happened from certain individuals. "Bono was obviously a moment," smiles Ure. "It's well known Bono had problems with the context of 'Thank God it's them'. Once Bob explained it: 'It means 'Thank God it's not *you*,'' then Bono took it and belted it out. I wasn't expecting that. On the guide vocal, I sang Bono's line fairly low-key. Between Bono singing it and Phil Collins' drums coming in then, the whole song just lifted at that point."

DISTINCTIVE VOICES

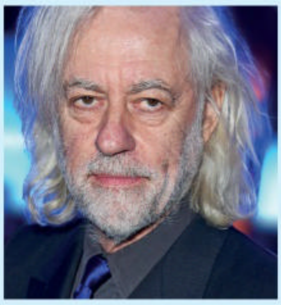
Having stuck the Band Aids together, Horn recognises how well all of the subsequent singers have shone in the new track. "Hearing them all makes you realise who has a distinctive voice," he says. "It was an interesting experience to have so many great singers in the computer. Sam Smith: woah, what a distinctive voice. Boy George is incredible, too. You can tell him a mile off."

Geldof asked Horn to include everyone's vocals if he could on the new Band Aid. The producer's initial approach was to treat it as his return to making a 12" remix: "I went through a phase of doing 12"s in the 80s then, around 1987, I got completely sick of them.

"I started by thinking of this as being like a 12", but that was difficult because the original Band Aid multitrack hardly has anything on it.

THE Sun
BAND OF HOPE

Midge Ure after a long day at Air Studios in London recording the updated Band Aid 20 single



FURTHER AID

Midge Ure is concerned for the future of Band Aid, as the charity doesn't have a natural replacement for Bob Geldof to take over the running of the project.

"I'm worried about what will happen when Bob is too old," Ure ponders. "We have to pass the baton on and figure out what to do with its legacy. There's no one waiting in the wings to take over, no one of today's musicians who might do it that I know of. Somebody might have spoken to Bob about that, but I don't think so."

The charity doesn't have the same high profile that it did in the 80s, as Ure says: "It's not the beast that it was back in the day, but it's just as important. Everyone has their own causes now, but maybe there's someone out there waiting. [Me and Bob] still email all the time, assessing requests for funding from agencies in the field and funding the ones who fit the brief we've had for 40 years. It still matters."

It's mainly vocals, with a fairly spare backing track." Horn's solution was to get his regular keyboard player, Jamie Muhoberac, to add parts Horn could dot around his new version.

Horn soon realised that some fundamentals had to stay. "I wanted to still start with Paul Young," he says. "Paul's voice is so classic, it had to stay. Chris Martin has a great voice, too, and I was pleased with how Paul's voice goes into Chris'. It is interesting how well Sting's voice works, too. Sting blends with everyone, so I use a lot of his harmonies. Sting sounds fantastic, even with people who he never sang with on the original."

Less universal is Dizzee Rascal's rap from Band Aid 20. Great rapper though he is, Dizzee's verse could have jarred next to, say, Tony Hadley. "I didn't really like where Dizzee sits in the 2004 version," confesses Horn. "I thought he was really shoehorned in, so I wanted to give Dizzee more space now."

Horn and Ure are both delighted *Do They Know It's Christmas?* has become as standard as Christmas carols, with Ure quietly chuffed that teachers explain the reasons why Band Aid happened to schoolchildren who sing it during the festive season.

That doesn't mean Ure is blind to criticisms of the song's lyrics from a 2024 viewpoint – but he's frustrated when people don't recognise they were written from a 1984 perspective. "Had it been written today, we might have had a different take on it," he offers. "Bob's lyrics might have been less abrasive. It's radically unfair to look back and go: "Them instead of you"? Ouch! "Here's to them"? Oh no!' It's what worked at the time.

© Dave Hogan/Band Aid

Sugababes gather around the mic to record their parts for Band Aid 20

"We were trying to make something inherently fluffy in its nature, which is a record to get played in the charts, for a cause. It wasn't meant to be an analytical song and, as a song, it wasn't groundbreaking. As an event, that is when it became groundbreaking."

An inherently fluffy song raising money for a cause is a large constant between all five takes of *Do They Know It's Christmas?* As Ure insists: "Being covered by every generation means money for the cause. That's it. Every generation should do its own interpretation. Whether I like it doesn't matter. Whether the public likes it doesn't matter, so long as they buy it! None of it matters, so long as those funds are generated. The style of any version, who sings it: it's nonsense. It doesn't matter. Trevor's new version won't sell a gazillion copies like the first one, because it's being released in a different world. But it can make people aware of what happened then and what's happening now. That's what matters."

So who's on Band Aid 50 won't matter either? "Nope! Band Aid is a platform, a soapbox. In order to get the word out, you need the biggest artists to do that. If Taylor Swift is still around in a decade, then she is cordially invited to come along and bring her fans with her. It'll be the same principle, just 50 years later." ■

The latest incarnation of the Band Aid single comes with a new Peter Blake-designed cover

FEED THE WORLD

● ***Do They Know It's Christmas? – 2024 Ultimate Mix* is available to buy now digitally and on CD and 12" vinyl formats**

PRETENDERS

So special: (L-R) Pete Farndon, Chrissie Hynde, James Honeyman-Scott and Martin Chambers in 1979

CLASSIC ALBUM

PRETENDERS

THE PRETENDERS

CHRISSIE HYNDE'S QUARTET ARRIVED STRAIGHT OUT OF THE BLOCKS WITH A COMPELLING DEBUT ALBUM, COMBINING SPIKY PUNK ATTITUDE, JANGLE-POP AND STREETWISE LYRICISM. IT'S ONE OF THOSE VERY RARE FIRST RECORDS THAT'S AN INSTANT CLASSIC... **FELIX ROWE**

Those seeking a symbol of the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s need only compare the final UK No.1 single of December 1979 with its successor in January 1980. The crown princes of prog, Pink Floyd, were unceremoniously kicked off their throne by a ragtag group of snotty, young pop-punk pretenders. Quite literally, The Pretenders. The charts moved from bricks in a wall to brass in a pocket.

Just to seal the deal, in the very same week, the group released their long-awaited debut album, simultaneously knocking those other 70s stalwarts, ABBA, off pole position. It was a swift and decisive one-two punch. *Pretenders* ushered in a new decade, kickstarting a career that continues to resonate to this day. Not bad for a band who, according to the producer of their debut single, "weren't going anywhere".

On paper, it was nothing particularly revolutionary – the standard pub-rock line-up of vocals, two guitars, bass and drums. No futuristic synthesizers or drum machines typically associated with the 80s New Wave. If anything, The Pretenders were rooted in tradition, and even derided by some as mere 60s throwbacks, thanks to those jangly guitars and girl-group harmonies.

But the razor-tongued street lyricism (delivered, shock horror, by a lady) was a thoroughly modern, fresh take on the formula. At a time when girls with guitars were still treated with suspicion by their male counterparts, Chrissie Hynde stood front and centre, thrashing out spiky chords on her Telecaster, while spewing vitriol from her potty mouth. Effortlessly cool, Hynde remains a true trailblazer, forging a path in male-dominated territory and doing so on her own terms.

But it wasn't all full-on, snarling assault; Hynde could coo sweetly, showcasing a candid tenderness beneath the grit. On the singles released for radio, they managed to pull off that age-old subversive trick of wrapping up provocative, even X-rated subject matter in sweet pop melodies, so that half the audience bopping along to *Top Of The Pops* at home were none the wiser.

At first glance, they were an odd bunch: an American woman from the Midwest state of Ohio, and three lanky Englishmen, originating from the ancient county town of Hereford. Not necessarily the most immediate candidates for assembling a streetwise punk collective. But perhaps that small-town sensibility, of pining for something greater and the allure of the big city, was a key part of The Pretenders' make-up.

Long before The Pretenders broke through, Hynde was already something of a scene veteran, immersed in the London punk crowd since the mid-70s. After a brief stint writing for the *NME,* she later worked at

AT A TIME WHEN GIRLS WITH GUITARS WERE STILL TREATED WITH SUSPICION BY THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS, CHRISSIE HYNDE STOOD FRONT AND CENTRE, THRASHING OUT CHORDS, SPEWING VITRIOL FROM HER POTTY MOUTH

Malcolm McClaren and Vivienne Westwood's shop, Sex, crossing paths with many of the key players – even at one point proposing to Johnny Rotten, apparently for that most romantic reason of attaining a work visa.

She was well known, with the right look and the attitude, just searching for the right act to launch her career. Hynde rubbed shoulders with various incarnations of soon-to-be seminal acts in their formative years, including The Clash, The Damned, Sex Pistols and Steve Strange. In another world (one much more rubbish than the one we inhabit), she might have been remembered as one of those infamous scene also-rans, known only for her cameos on the periphery of her contemporaries' success. By the time of that first Pretenders record, most of her 20s were well behind her, but the steadfast self-conviction had won out, and in time, she would outflank them all.

LAST GANG IN TOWN

Make no mistake, The Pretenders were conceived from the start as a vehicle for Hynde. But the band dynamic was equally key to that vision, and integral to their ultimate success. Her manager issued a directive to get a band together, long before they'd settled on a name. There's no doubting the collective contribution to the classic Pretenders sound; a unique chemistry between the original line-up that would prove hard – nay, impossible – to replicate.

Hynde's unconventional time signatures on rhythm guitar initially caught her band members off guard, forcing them to come up with their own counting methods simply to keep time. But this became a part of their edge. What's more, there's something subtle yet essential in the interplay of Hynde and drummer Martin Chambers. When Hynde is pressing forward with her rhythm guitar, Chambers is hanging back, creating a unique groove. They are pinned together with Pete Farndon's ever-moving basslines and layered over with James Honeyman-Scott's inventive jangly guitars.

Hynde lent a fresh voice to a tired format, breathing new life into old tropes and subverting the status quo. She pivots between

The Pretenders' debut LP landed at UK No.1 and stayed there for four consecutive weeks. It also made the US Billboard Top 10.

> THOUGH IN MANY WAYS POLAR OPPOSITIES, HYNDE SHARES SOMETHING WITH MORRISSEY, IN THAT BOTH COULD DELIVER A BOLT FROM NOWHERE; A RAZOR-SHARP, WITHERING PUT-DOWN THAT IS AS WITTY AS IT IS DEADLY

self-assured, even confrontational swagger and an arresting vulnerability, sometimes in the same song. Despite the punky abrasion, Hynde is never overtly political. The subject matter is more often than not about relationships or, perhaps more accurately, liaisons… and sometimes even confrontations or altercations.

That freedom to say whatever the hell she wants is a liberating concept. Though in many ways polar opposites, Hynde shares something with Morrissey, in that both of them could deliver a bolt from nowhere; a razor-sharp, vicious, withering put-down that is as witty as it is deadly. It is that double-take: "Oh, my god, did she actually just say that?" Yes, she really did. In fact, the pair would later collaborate on *Shame Is The Name*, a bonus track from Morrissey's 2009 album *Years Of Refusal*, while his former bandmate Johnny Marr, based his early jangly sound on Honeyman-Scott, and would briefly join The Pretenders in 1987.

To cut a record, Hynde called on her friend, power pop hero Nick Lowe, who was then best known for his production work with Elvis Costello. But Lowe was decidedly unimpressed with her compositions, issuing that immortal line that the songs "weren't going anywhere". Lowe, however, conceded that their version of The Kinks' *Stop Your Sobbing* was pretty good, and indeed his recording of that one track gave the band their first Top 40 hit, their debut single peaking at a respectable No.34 on the UK charts.

Ultimately, the producer job went to Chris Thomas, both an industry heavyweight and a safe pair of hands. Thomas got his first break producing The Beatles, no less, taking the helm on the 'White Album' while his boss, George Martin, went on holiday. He had a foot in both prog and punk, having famously refereed the mixing sessions on *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and then co-produced the Sex Pistols' debut album.

The sessions were recorded in London's Wessex and AIR studios. The result, however, was not too overproduced, but more about capturing the moment of a band playing together. It's raw, edgy and powerful. But it's considered, too. Honeyman-Scott crafted a signature sound for his catchy solos that he would go away and perfect, note-for-note before laying them down.

To borrow that tired football cliché, *Pretenders* is very much a game of two halves.

THE PLAYERS

CHRISSIE HYNDE
The frontwoman and rhythm guitarist, known for her swagger, sassy delivery and wry way with words. The only continuous member of the group.

JAMES HONEYMAN-SCOTT
The lead guitarist was integral to the original Pretenders sound, and a big influence on a young Johnny Marr. Honeyman-Scott died in 1982 of cocaine-induced heart failure at the age of 25.

PETE FARNDON
The tough-guy bassist, who dressed as a biker and Samurai. Hynde would say that what he lacked in skill he made up for in force of nature. But the force would become too much in the end. Farndon was fired in 1982, days before Honeyman-Scott's death, then tragically drowned in the bath after a heroin overdose in 1983.

MARTIN CHAMBERS
Besides Hynde, the drummer is the only other surviving member, though his later involvement has been sporadic. Chambers brings punk chops, swing and dexterity to the groove. Later played with Razorlight and fellow Hereford band, Mott The Hoople

CHRIS THOMAS
The producer of the group's first three albums was dubbed the 'fifth Pretender'. Later, he worked with INXS, bringing them huge success on another classic album previously showcased in these pages, *Kick* – and Pulp's *Different Class*.

THE SONGS ▶▶

① PRECIOUS

Pretenders makes its introduction with a driving 4/4 beat and chugging New Wave guitars, a flange effect being the only concession to modern production styles. From the off, Hynde's tongue is sharpened, spewing about "shitting bricks" and doing it "on the pavement", followed later by the vitriolic "fuck off!" Hynde's stop-start delivery, full of affected tics and stutters, emulates that sense of frustrated youth first heard on *My Generation.* A bold and uncompromising start.

② THE PHONE CALL

According to Farndon, "The heaviest fuckin' punk rocker you could do in 5/4 time." And true to his word, it's a gnarly rhythm that even trips the listener up; it's near impossible to get a hold on the groove. The result is chaotic sounding, and bloody fantastic to boot.

③ UP THE NECK

Opening like that classic Who track (*Won't Get Fooled Again*), it drives forwards at a slightly more relaxed pace, with Hynde adding a melodic tone. On first listen, it sounds a bit ploddy in comparison to the earlier assaults. But when you listen closely to the lyrics, it's obvious this is as weighty as anything on the album that's come before.

④ TATTOOED LOVE BOYS

A total change of pace for this fast, skittish, punky track. The result is almost akin to skiffle on steroids, charging along like a barn-stormer, with a simple chorus guitar lick, and some of Hynde's most acerbic lyrical flow on the LP. It's the song that got several journalists rather hot under the collar, and rightly so.

⑤ SPACE INVADER

Whoever said these guys couldn't play their instruments? This warped instrumental sounds like a classic cop show theme gone awry, with some sharp riffs and innovative textures. It showcases low-slung bass work from Farndon, accentuated by menacing tom-toms played in the introduction from Chambers. The interesting rhythmic ideas show the back-line's dexterity and originality beyond the straight-up pub-rock template of many contemporaries. *Space Invader* is a fun workout and, crucially, it's another weapon in the arsenal that elevates the band above the punk also-rans.

⑥ THE WAIT

Straight-up punk, complete with the chugging guitars, yet with those idiosyncratic time signatures designed to trip you up again. Hynde fires out her vocals in a staccato, machine-gun delivery. A fine walking bassline from Farndon keeps it constantly moving. Indeed, it's the bass that's responsible for kicking the song into orbit when the chorus arrives. A nice wailing solo from Honeyman-Scott, too.

⑦ STOP YOUR SOBBING

Proto-punks The Kinks were the go-to choice for cover versions by the late-70s New Wave, with everyone from The Jam to The Stranglers celebrating the Brit rockers. Going full circle, Hynde would not only perform the song of her teenage hero, Ray Davies, but then go on to date him and give birth to his daughter. *Stop Your Sobbing* is something of an outlier, being the only track produced by Nick Lowe, back in 1978 and released a whole year (almost to the day) before the parent album came out. It featured Gerry Mackelduff on drums before Martin Chambers officially completed the line-up. The difference in production style, when compared with the neighbouring tracks, is audibly jarring, sounding much cleaner and more polished, with a ton of reverb on the vocals. While it has more sheen, the reverb and jangle make it sound more distant and much less immediate, losing the intimacy and grit heard on the Chris Thomas-produced tracks. Musically, it's a bit of a red herring, but a fantastic cover, nonetheless.

⑧ KID

The second single, which stalled at No.33, is another with a 60s group vibe, thanks to its twangy guitar riff straight out of The Shadows' schoolbook. It's more jangle pop in the same vein as *Stop Your Sobbing.* Indeed, the walking bassline and harmonies almost extend further back to 50s doo-wop territory. One of a few tracks where Hynde sings unbridled, adding another dimension, and helping the record from being too one-sided. But again, it's a subversive move, as underneath the sweet, melodic stylings is a darker undertone of a mother sharing regrets with her young child. Some lovely lead guitar work from Honeyman-Scott in the interludes, while the record's first introduction of acoustic guitar provides another texture. This was later covered by Everything But The Girl.

⑨ PRIVATE LIFE

Many listeners will know this as a Grace Jones track (the third single from her *Warm Leatherette* LP). Indeed, both songs were released in the same year. And the two must be heard together, as Hynde almost sounds like she's doing an impression of Jones, in the speak-sing patois she adopts. It's another unexpected pivot, this time a stripped-back reggae vibe, with lots of space, shuffly drums and dubby bassline. It proves a real showcase for the rhythmic talents of Martin Chambers, knocking out juicy ghost notes with remarkable dexterity. Hynde's lead vocal loosely weaves in and out of the arrangement, in contrast to the taut and syncopated backing vocals. Again, it's showing their range. Honeyman-Scott flits between lovely arpeggiated riffs and screaming – almost proggy – guitar solos. The longest track on the LP, it's allowed the space to breathe.

⑩ BRASS IN POCKET

The biggest hit and most immediate track on the album is bizarrely buried on Side Two in the spot usually reserved for weaker filler. Perhaps because Hynde apparently wasn't too happy with it; specifically, her vocal performance made her cringe, famously proclaiming it'd be released over her dead body. But she's still alive, it was released as a single, and it gave them a stonking big No.1. Hynde's loss is the world's gain, because *Brass In Pocket* is, of course, fantastic, and it's clearly the top vocal performance on the record. Bouncy and mid-tempo, it grooves along on a wave of positivity with shimmering guitar work, and a funky perpetually moving bassline. It holds the honour of being the first new UK No.1 of the new decade, for two weeks in January. Later covered by Suede for an *NME* compilation.

⑪ LOVERS OF TODAY

Another soothing ballad, but with an interesting stop-start arrangement. This gradually builds in intensity, mainly through some stellar guitar work, accentuated by backing vocals that are almost gospel in nature. The arrangement manages to be both understated, yet simultaneously overblown and epic.

⑫ MYSTERY ACHIEVEMENT

Opening with an extended drum intro before Farndon's bass kicks in, the band bring the intensity back up a notch for the album's closing track. Some chorus guitars and the overall vibe sound more like The Police, a la *Message In A Bottle*, which can only be a good thing. Charging along on a straight-up 2/4 punk beat, it's a rollocking end to a fine album.

The Pretenders take the stage at the Nashville Rooms in London on 8 March 1979

The first side is an unrelenting, abrasive assault of chugging guitars and punky rhythms, with opening cuts *Precious* and *The Phone Call* particularly keen to demonstrate their punk credentials. The second half, however, is a total change of pace: much slower, more melodic and even, at times, sentimental. As if having proved their mettle, they're now assured enough to let the bravado drop and showcase their range.

Despite the January 1980 release date, the album was really a child of the 70s, recorded throughout 1978 and 1979, with two Top 40 singles released in that latter year. Whether an intentional stroke of genius or a more mundane result of scheduling (probably the latter), it proved a savvy marketing move in laying claim to being "the first great record of the 1980s".

POTENT NEW PROSPECTS

Classic albums need classic cover art, and *Pretenders* is no exception. It's a sleeve you have to pick up just to find out what noise they make. Note Hynde rocking that scarlet red, sharp-shouldered military jacket, predating Michael Jackson's later imitation on *Thriller*.

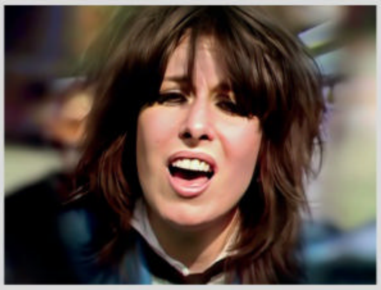
Pretenders was an instant hit, quickly shooting to the top, enjoying both critical plaudits and commercial success. Contemporaries Blondie had a similar trajectory, crossing from the punk clubs to the pop charts with dignity intact, though Hynde is a different beast entirely. Yet despite many gushing reviews claiming epiphany moments, it wasn't universal acclaim. While some saw it as a genuinely innovative record, others dismissed *Pretenders* as a mere 1960s throwback – a view perhaps based on the two big singles.

> WHETHER AN INTENTIONAL STROKE OF GENIUS OR A MORE MUNDANE RESULT OF SCHEDULING, IT PROVED A SAVVY MARKETING MOVE IN LAYING CLAIM TO BEING "THE FIRST GREAT RECORD OF THE 1980s"

But with the passing of time, it's one of those records that sounds as fresh and vital as it did on release. *Pretenders* entered the Grammy Hall of Fame in 2016 and remains a regular fixture on all the retrospective best albums lists. As debuts go, it's a potent introduction to an exciting new prospect.

Sadly, that original four-piece would never get the chance to fully develop their sound. Within just three years, half the band had fallen, with both Farndon and Honeyman-Scott succumbing to drug-related deaths. That the two still standing would go on have a lasting commercial career is a phenomenal achievement in itself. ■

THE VIDEOS ▶▶



STOP YOUR SOBBING

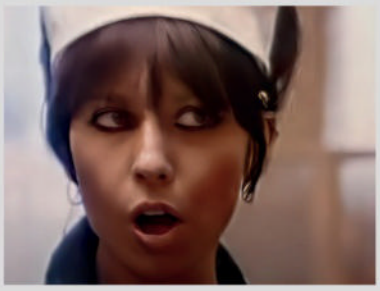
A straight-up, low-budget performance video, with the band doing their thing on a stage in what looks like a pub. The boys with guitars share a mic for the girl group harmonies behind Chrissie, with a few close-ups of Hynde. It's all played fairly safe; there's no real technical trickery, but it doesn't need it. This promo is all about introducing the band as a collective unit. Note Chambers performs in the video, though not on the original recording.

KID

Filmed at an amusement park, with a more intricate treatment of dynamic screen fades cutting the movement of the rides and carousel, colourful in the primary colours, interspersed with the band's performance. They're all sharp; Hynde in a crisp blue blazer, Honeyman-Scott dapper in sky blue suit and pink guitar, and just Farndon the outlier in his biker get-up. No big concept here, but the fairground reflects a sense of childhood wonder and naivety.

BRASS IN POCKET

With Mark Robinson on directorial duties, Hynde reveals her under-appreciated acting nous, playing a waitress in a greasy spoon cafe with dreams of a more glamorous life. The three boys rock up in a pink Cadillac, piquing her interest at the thought of hooking up. But her dream is smashed as their respective beaus turn up, and they drive off into the horizon, leaving Hynde without her fairytale ending. Apparently, she was unhappy that the director 'hijacked' the original concept that featured her riding off with the boys on the back of a motorcycle. However, the final result is more affecting, because of its subtlety. No visual trickery or special effects are required; it's all about the situation.



Pete Farndon at The Agora Ballroom in Atlanta, 1980

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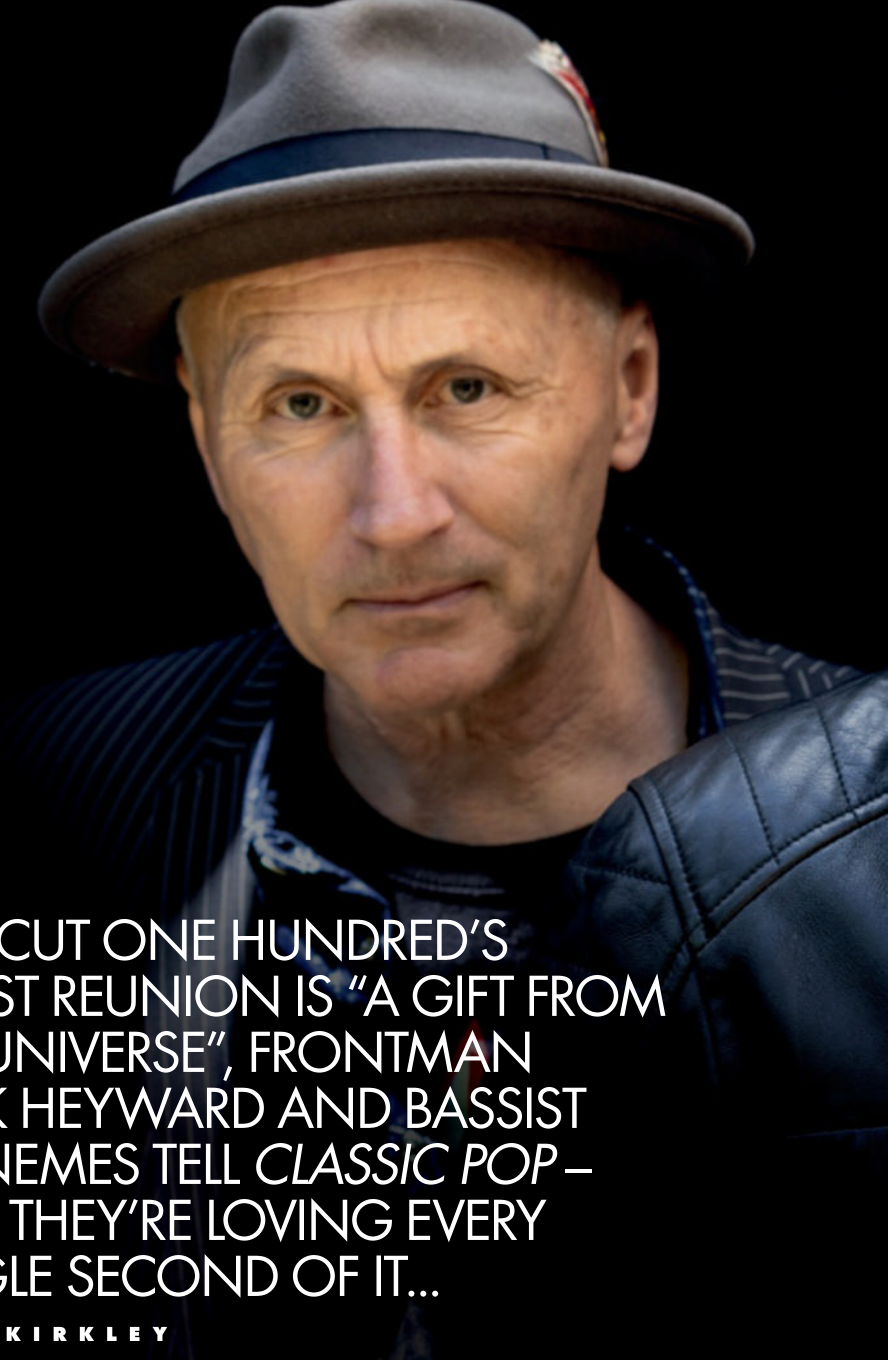


FANTASTIC DAYS

HAIRCUT ONE HUNDRED'S LATEST REUNION IS "A GIFT FROM THE UNIVERSE", FRONTMAN NICK HEYWARD AND BASSIST LES NEMES TELL *CLASSIC POP* – AND THEY'RE LOVING EVERY SINGLE SECOND OF IT...

PAUL KIRKLEY

Haircut One Hundred made their long-awaited return in August with comeback single *The Unloving Plum* – and a new album is on the way

"I've just been arrested!" says Nick Heyward, by way of an opening gambit, as he arrives for his date with *Classic Pop* in a Soho bar. "I had my rights read to me and everything," explains the Haircut One Hundred frontman, his trademark full-beam grin undimmed by his brush with the law. "My Senior Railcard had expired. I didn't know you had to renew it. I didn't even know you had to *apply* for one – I thought the government just gave you it. But it turns out Sara [his wife and manager] had got it for me. And it had run out."

How the powers-that-be could think so dimly of The Nicest Man in Pop™ is a mystery. But even more baffling is the idea of the eternally boyish Nick Heyward qualifying for such a concession in the first place – he's 63 but looks 20 years younger. Could he ever have imagined, as a fresh-faced teen launching Haircut One Hundred's idiosyncratic brand of carnival funk-pop on an unsuspecting world, that he might one day be a pop star with a Senior Railcard?

"I *hoped* it might happen – because it's something to aim for," says Nick. "And now that we are this age, we want it to go on longer and longer. Because we've got our friendship back."

This last comment is addressed to the man sitting next to him, bassist Les Nemes, who nods his agreement. "He sent me a WhatsApp just this morning, saying, 'Isn't it lovely to be friends again, and doing what we love?'" smiles Les.

"It's a really intense friendship that the three of us had back in the late 1970s and early 80s, when we were just kids with a dream," says Heyward, folding the band's other full-time member, guitarist Graham Jones, into the circle of love.

"If you'd asked me a year ago, 'Would this ever happen?' I'd have said, 'absolutely never'," admits Nemes. "We hadn't spoken for 10 years. But we've picked it up like it was yesterday."

"That's a real friendship thing, though, isn't it?" says Nick. "Time doesn't exist when you're real mates."

LOVE PLUS THREE

For a long time, Nick, Les and Graham were not mates. Struggling with the pressure to follow up their acclaimed debut album, 1982's *Pelican West*, Heyward found himself ejected from the band, who themselves called it a day following 1984's belly-flopping *Paint And Paint*.

In the decades since, there have been occasional reunions but, as Nick told *Classic Pop* in 2017, the onstage truce didn't

Haircuts Reunited: (L-R) Graham Jones, Nick Heyward, Les Nemes and Blair Cunningham

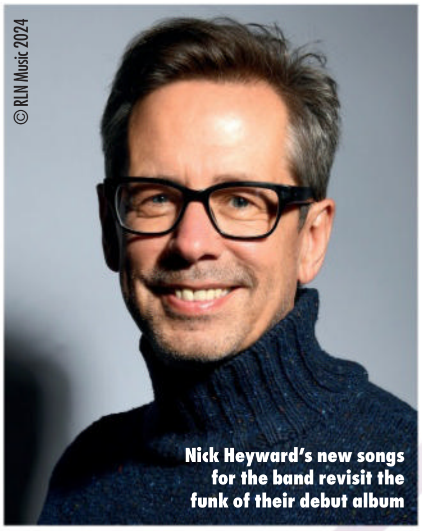
translate to an offstage relationship. So what changed? “Well, there's still a couple of members stuck in the past – that's the reason,” says Heyward, pointedly. Saxophonist Phil Smith and percussionist Marc Fox haven't rejoined the party, though drummer Blair Cunningham is on board as an affiliate member. “They've got issues they didn't want to talk about. But the rest of us have moved on.”

“I told Nick, ‘I don't care what happened in the past’,” says Les. “That's gone, and the future isn't here. So the only thing that matters is right now.”

“It all evaporated, didn't it?” says Nick. “All the things we thought we needed to talk about, they evaporated pretty much immediately. And every day since has been a bonus.”

No-one is more surprised than Heyward and Nemes to find Haircut One Hundred back onboard the pop carousel full-time. Initially reuniting for a show at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire to mark the 40th anniversary reissue of *Pelican West* last year, they've since toured the UK and the US, played Glastonbury, released their first single together in 42 years, and are currently working on a new studio album.

“We thought the reunion show would be emotional, but it's been getting more emotional as we go along,” explains Nick. “It's like a dynamo, like a bike – it's picking up speed and energy as it goes on.”



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Nick Heyward's new songs for the band revisit the funk of their debut album

“The mad thing was, we didn't arrange any of it – it all came to us,” says Les. “It was like the universe said, ‘Alright, I'm going to arrange everything, and all you need to do is turn up’. And that's what we've been doing ever since – turning up.”

“The universe is a great arranger,” nods Heyward. “I've asked it to start looking after my funeral...”

The universe got a helping hand, though, from the late music promoter Melvyn Taub, who passed away from pancreatic cancer in September. “If it wasn't for Melvyn, none of this would have happened,” says Nemes. “He organised everything, pushed for everything.”

“He was a lifelong fan of power pop and pop-funk, who I'd met when I was younger, and it was his dream for us to be back,” says Nick, eyes moistening. “A lovely guy. He is the universe, really.”

AMERICAN DREAMS

Returning to the States as special guests of ABC and Howard Jones, more than four decades after their last US shows, was an emotional experience for the band – and, it turned out, their audience. “Some people had flown hundreds of miles, or done a road trip from Texas to Utah, or wherever,” says Heyward. “And they brought all these memories with them – of finding their partner or losing them, or going through chemo... I remember one night watching a woman standing with her husband, and within the first couple of bars of *Love Plus One*, she had started crying. And you thought, ‘My god, what does that song mean to her?’ By the end of the tour, we were all losing it.

“The shows also went to another level of authenticity. As young indie aspirants from south London, we could only dream of being so authentically Latin American, but on these shows we had our Venezuelan drummer, Izzy, and Felipe Fournier, who's a Grammy-winning percussionist from Costa Rica. These guys were just on fire, aiming for

Haircut One Hundred
a kingsize stereo forty five cut
THE UNLOVING PLUM

BEARING FRUIT

In August, Haircut One Hundred shared their first new song in four decades in the form of *The Unloving Plum* – a jubilant, summery earworm (and Radio 2 Record of the Week, to boot).

"The song is about that first relationship that makes you feel like anyone – and the first that broke my soul into a million pieces," says Nick. "The unloving plum is a bit like the Lotus flower – where does it come from? It comes from the mud. But there's that light that comes from tasting it for the first time. So it was just built around wordplay from that."

The opening line, 'Cover me in diet pop' was, adds Nick, originally more brand-specific. "It was, 'Cover me in Diet Coke'. But Radio 2 and other stations said, 'Sorry, no product placement'. Though I note that Addison Rae can get away with [recent hit] *Diet Pepsi*, so it's obviously different rules for her."

The single arrived with a playful, *Frankenstein*-riffing video, directed by Tom Bailey (no, not *that* one). "Everyone told us videos aren't a thing anymore," says Nick. "But it's part of the creative process. We're not going to stop making them, just because they've gone out of favour."

Haircut One Hundred at Park West, Chicago, in 1982, the year they released *Pelican West*

> "I DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST. THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS IS RIGHT NOW."
>
> LES NEMES

the hips. It was such a powerhouse of energy – we only played six songs, but there were standing ovations every night."

Was there a natural *esprit de corps* between the 80s survivors on the bill? "We've all been through similar things, but having not done it for 42 years, we were probably processing it at a different level to the other two," reflects Nick. "The shows were so charged; I think it kind of ignited Martin Fry's competitive side. But Howard was much more chilled. He was just like, 'I love this, let's do more.'"

Back home, Haircut One Hundred crossed off another bucket list item when they made their Glastonbury Festival debut on the Avalon Stage. "It was amazing," smiles Les. "It was another thing I'd given up on," admits Heyward. "I thought, 'That's never going to happen'. But it did."

FILTERED FUNK

Their summer of love now over, the band are now knuckling down to the business of making a new album. In late August, they shared the first – ahem – fruits of those sessions with effervescent single *The Unloving Plum* (see boxout). So how much else is in the can?

"We've got eight songs that are kicking around," says Nemes. "And then we'll look for another two or three."

Speaking to *Classic Pop* last year, Les favoured a return to the band's early post-punk, Talking Heads-influenced days. "That is where I'd have *liked* it to go," he says today. "I saw it with no brass – just kicking back to the three of us and keeping it very raw. But it hasn't gone as far that way as I'd envisaged. There's still brass, there's still percussion…"

"There are still funky ones," Nick assures us. "There's one called *Vanishing Point*, which sounds a bit like the theme to [70s TV show] *The Streets Of San Francisco* meets James Brown. It's like a getaway car song. And *Dynamite* is a big, funky disco song, kind of like Earth, Wind and Fire."

haircut one hundred
pelican west

haircut ONE HUNDRED
PAINT
PAINT

Another track that's currently in contention, *Mudlarks*, returns to the geographical location of *Pelican West*. "It's about the Pelican Stairs [in East London], where they used to hang people," explains Heyward. "It's a very significant area for the band. But it's also a social commentary on how far we are regressing, as a culture. Are we going back to Dickensian times? Are we all going to be mudlarking?"

Mixing New Wave guitars with jazz funk and Brazilian rhythms, *Pelican West* remains a very singular creation: the missing link between Postcard Records and Nile Rodgers (via 1960s Tropicália and Bruce Lee movie soundtracks), it held a brace of Top 10 singles – *Favourite Shirts (Boy Meets Girl), Love Plus One, Fantastic Day* and *Nobody's Fool* – and sounds box-fresh today. So are they feeling the pressure to bottle lightning all over again and avoid what could (drawing a discreet veil over *Paint And Paint*) turn out to be the world's most delayed case of difficult second album syndrome?

"Who wouldn't feel the pressure?" says Nemes. Nick takes a more phlegmatic view: "You just do what you do. You can't let that stuff get to you. I've got way over that point. You just

BANDS ON THE RUN

With no small irony, Haircut One Hundred have re-entered the fray at a time when bands are increasingly looking like an endangered species. According to Richard Osman on *The Rest Is Entertainment* podcast, there were 146 weeks in the first half of the 80s when bands were at No.1 in the UK, while so far in the 2020s, bands have only topped the charts twice – and one of those was The Beatles.

"It's an amazing thing to be in a band," says Nick. "Honestly, I'd love to do talks on it, because it's really a lost art at the moment. I mean, obviously there are loads of bands out there – but they're not in the mainstream.

"I have such strong memories of us living together in London, being in a band, when that changeover from the New Romantics into Brit-funk started to happen. We'd moved up from Beckenham to Forest Hill, and we'd hang out in clubs like Le Beat Route and Legends together, we dressed like each other. It was just a really strong relationship."

"Every Friday night, we'd drive around like The Specials in the *Ghost Town* video," recalls Les. "I think the aim was to try to pick up women. But we were rubbish at it."

The original six-piece incarnation of Mk.1 Haircut One Hundred

> "SOMETIMES, YOU HAVE TO LET GO OF THE THING YOU WANT, IN ORDER TO GET IT"
>
> NICK HEYWARD

have to turn up and be as creative as you can. It doesn't work if you're consciously trying to *be* Haircut One Hundred. You've got to let one thing lead to another.

"We've found a way of working that suits us, which is to play live. We'll start doing one thing, and it will evolve into something else. Sometimes you have to allow it to come through you. Then Les is my first port of call – if Les doesn't get a bassline for it, it isn't a Haircut song. And then Graham has his filter, because Graham's a Clash fan 'til the end of his days. So that's the process the songs get filtered through."

PRICELESS FRIENDSHIP

With the days of record company largesse now a distant memory, it's also a question of logistics. "The trick is to keep turning up and rehearsing and recording, because we're not minted," says Heyward. "There's no budget – we've just worked a whole year for hardly anything. We're doing it out of pure love."

Nick takes out his phone and scrolls through the scores of song sketches he's recorded as voice notes. He plays one, in which he sings: "If I haven't got a friend, I haven't got anything". "That's what it's been lately," he says, beaming at Les again. "We love our friendship being back. It's even better than it used to be. A powerful thing."

Cards on the table: do they wish they'd done all this sooner?

"A few months ago, Nick said, 'Why have we not been doing this for 42 years? This is so amazing, why did we stop?'" says Les. "I think regret is too strong a word. But there's some disappointment, maybe."

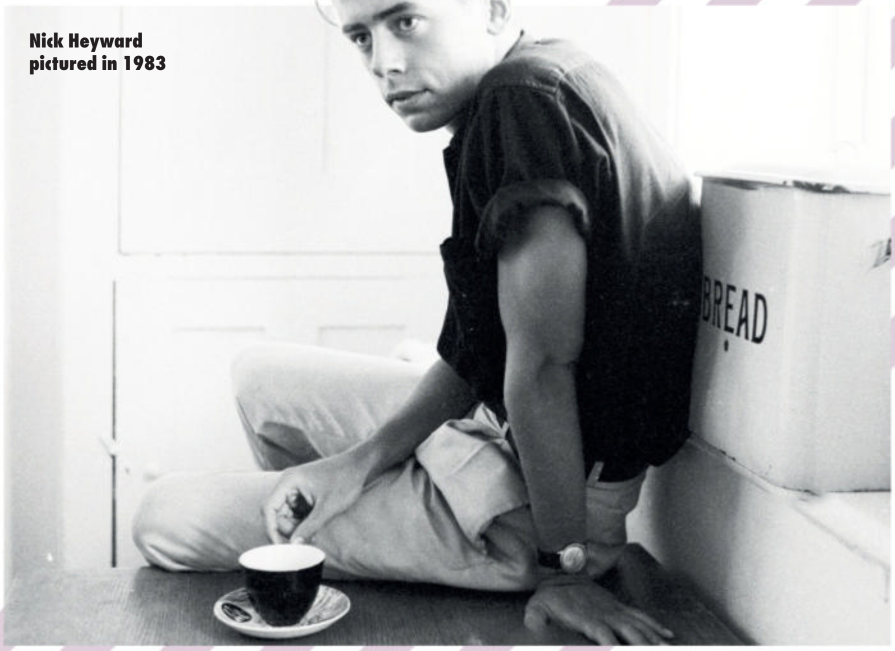
"There's nothing you can do about it," shrugs Heyward. "And part of me wonders whether we'd have this brilliant friendship we have now, if we'd kept going."

"There's also the fact that putting it off another 10 years wasn't really an option," admits Nemes, who recently turned 64. "You have stages of life – we're in autumn."

To add to that, Nick isn't sure they'd have been greeted as such conquering heroes if they'd done it earlier. "Bands go through life cycles," he suggests. "And for 10 or maybe 20 years after your first success, you're not very cool.

"There've been times when, if you didn't get a record contract, then you didn't exist. Also, if we'd done this 20 years ago, we might have been a bit arsey about it. But when you get older, the egocentric side of you tends to evaporate. As you disappear from public relevance, you actually feel more alive.

"Sometimes, you have to let go of the thing you want, in order to get it. And now we've got it, we're loving it. It hasn't been easy to get here, but now we're here, it's just... Wow." ■



Nick Heyward pictured in 1983

CAN LIVE IN STUTTGART 1975
CAN LIVE IN BRIGHTON 1975
CAN LIVE IN CUXHAVEN 1976
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TERRY HALL

ONE OF BRITISH POP'S FINEST, TERRY HALL HELPED PIONEER A WHOLE NEW MOVEMENT WITH THE SPECIALS BEFORE UTILISING HIS FAMOUSLY DEADPAN TALENTS IN NUMEROUS EQUALLY INTRIGUING BANDS, SIDE PROJECTS, SUPERGROUPS AND SOLO RELEASES

JON O'BRIEN

SPECIALS
A MESSAGE TO YOU RUDY
DO THE DOG
IT'S UP TO YOU
NITE KLUB
DOESN'T MAKE IT ALRIGHT
CONCRETE JUNGLE
TOO HOT
MONKEY MAN
(DAWNING OF A) NEW ERA
BLANK EXPRESSION
STUPID MARRIAGE
TOO MUCH TOO YOUNG
LITTLE BITCH
YOU'RE WONDERING NOW
2 TONE

Formerly known as The Coventry Automatics, The Specials turned their West Midlands hometown into an unlikely cultural hub towards the end of the 70s, infusing the music of Jamaica with a distinctly British punk spirit to pioneer the sound that became known as 2 Tone.

Featuring the guitarists Lynval Golding and Roddy 'Radiation' Byers, bass player Horace Panter and, eventually, drummer John Bradbury, as well as roadie-turned-singer Neville Staple and poker-faced vocalist Terry Hall, the band had been formed by chief songwriter Jerry Dammers with the intention of putting Coventry on the map. And after being discovered by Joe Strummer, leading to a support slot on The Clash's Out On Parole Tour, the seven-piece soon achieved their goal.

Of course, The Specials didn't always paint the city in the most flattering light, the majority of their original material reflecting on the hardships of suburban life during the early years of Thatcherite Britain. *Concrete Jungle* was written by Byers about being chased by the National Front, while *It's Up To You* and *Doesn't Make It Alright* both further tackle the band's experiences of racism head on. And *Too Much Too Young*, a live recording of which would later give the band a controversial No.1, is a kitchen sink vignette in which the band show their blatant disdain towards an adolescent mother.

> THE SPECIALS TURNED THEIR HOMETOWN INTO AN UNLIKELY CULTURAL HUB TOWARDS THE END OF THE 70s

Although The Specials were admirably keen to call out society's prejudices, this rhetoric could sometimes tip over into sexism. Amid the chatter and chinking glasses of *Nite Klub*, Hall declares "All the girls are slags," for example. And *Little Bitch* is downright nasty, berating a young girl for her appearance, bed-wetting tendencies and suicidal cries for attention. It's little wonder the group soon dropped the track from their set.

While not all of the band's lyrical themes have aged particularly well, a telling sign of their late teenage years, the music still remains positively thrilling. The Specials were particularly skilful in adapting ska classics for the New Wave crowd, with *Stupid Marriage* downgrading the murder charges of Prince Buster's *Judge Dread* to vengeful vandalism (with a little help from Chrissie Hynde to boot) and *Do The Dog* turning Rufus Thomas' original into a commentary on the rising levels of subcultural violence.

Elvis Costello, meanwhile, was the perfect choice of producer, his unfussy approach brilliantly recapturing the raw energy of the band's live shows. As opening mission statements go, this was pretty special.

THE SPECIALS

Released 1979
Label 2 Tone
Chart Positions
UK No.4 US No.84

MORE SPECIALS
2 TONE

As its title suggested, The Specials' second LP initially appeared to be more of the same. Side One was bookended by repurposed covers, with music hall standard *Enjoy Yourself* turned into a pogo-inducing ska anthem about the increasing likelihood of nuclear attacks and the kitsch Northern Soul of *Sock It To 'Em J.B.* updating the James Bond references of Rex Garvin's original.

The gloominess of life under a Tory government was still the default theme. Hall's first writing credit *Man At C&A* ramped up the Cold War paranoia further. *Hey, Little Rich Girl* charted the fortunes of a young woman whose big city dreams are exploited by the porn industry. And in case you still hadn't twigged that the Coventry outfit weren't the picture of contentment, *Pearl's Cafe*, a collaboration with future The Special AKA member Rhoda Dakar – explicitly declared "It's all a load of bollocks."

However, with Dammers itching to broaden the group's horizons – "I didn't want us to end up like Bad Manners," he told *Uncut* – Side Two knocked everyone, including his own bandmates, for six. Inspired by the hotel lobby music that became an inadvertent soundtrack of their previous tour, Dammers pursued an intriguing melting pot of easy listening styles worlds apart from the 2 Tone that had gone before.

Stereotype/Stereotypes Pt.2 throws in everything from bossa nova to Bach while depicting how an average man's life descends into STD-contracting, alcohol-heavy and police-evading chaos. *International Jet Set* ventures into Middle Eastern psychedelia, concluding with the harrowing final cries from a passenger plane about to crash land. There's even a calypso instrumental, *Holiday Fortnight*.

More Specials has been credited with both pioneering trip-hop and foreshadowing the lounge music revival, while it also repeated the Top Five success of its predecessor. Yet it proved the death knell for The Specials' original incarnation. Frustrated at Dammers' "my way or the highway" approach and the pressures of the industry treadmill, the band splintered shortly after the era-defining single *Ghost Town* gave them a second No.1.

> *MORE SPECIALS* PROVED THE DEATH KNELL FOR THE BAND'S ORIGINAL INCARNATION

MORE SPECIALS

Released 1980
Label 2 Tone
Chart Positions
UK No.5 US No.98

THE FUN BOY THREE

"The sound of three people sent mental by being in The Specials," was how Hall described the 1981 offshoot he formed with Golding and Staple to *The Guardian* in 2009. Fun Boy Three's self-titled debut album does indeed have a *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* vibe, from the deranged assortment of animal noises and football whistles that pervade *Funrama 2* to the fact that its lead single – an attack on either the Thatcher/Reagan special relationship or their new musical foe, Jerry Dammers, depending on your own interpretation – was titled *The Lunatics (Have Taken Over The Asylum)*.

But there was also method to their madness, with the trio – now sporting Persil-white singlets rather than two-tone suits – firmly subscribing to the theory that less is more across 11 tracks, eclectic as they were sparse.

Although its musical palette, co-produced with regular Specials cohort Dave Jordan, rarely expands beyond primitive percussion, inexpressive chants and Sprechgesang, *The Fun Boy Three* still manages to both intrigue and innovate.

Faith, Hope And Charity finds the boys tiptoeing onto the dancefloor with a rhythmic blend of metallic funk, distinctly British hip-hop, and early minimalist techno. *I Don't Believe It* adopts nursery rhyme melodies and paranoia-soaked reggae to rally against the surveillance of Black Britain, while *Best Of Luck Mate* is a dub poem about a debt-ridden man whose attempts to escape poverty are thwarted by his daily trips to the bookies.

Of course, Fun Boy Three's most invaluable contribution to the pop culture of the early 80s was its introduction of the era's biggest girlband. Bananarama, discovered by Hall thanks to an article in *The Face*, lend their nonchalant tones to four tracks including the haunting Gregorian vibes of opener *Sanctuary* and world-weary closer, *Alone*. But it's on the playful cover of Top Five hit *T'aint What You Do (It's The Way That You Do It)*, a jazz standard recorded by Ella Fitzgerald, where Siobhan, Keren and Sara make their presence known. "Where do we go to from here?/ What kind of sound do we follow?" FB3 ask on *Way On Down*. Minimalistic, mysterious and mischievous pop appeared to be the answer.

> THERE WAS METHOD TO THEIR MADNESS – *THE FUN BOY THREE* STILL MANAGES TO INTRIGUE AND INNOVATE

THE FUN BOY THREE

Released 1982
Label Chrysalis
Chart Positions
UK No.7 NL No.10

FUN BOY THREE
WAITING

After returning the favour on Bananarama collab *Really Saying Something* and also covering the George Gershwin standard *Summertime*, Fun Boy Three dramatically ended their run of five straight Top 20 hits with *The More I See (The Less I Believe)*, a bleak meditation on The Troubles that facetiously finished with the punchline, "Does anyone know any jokes?"

Luckily, the trio's second album had a few more bankable hits up its sleeve, namely the unexpected tango of *The Tunnel Of Love* and, most notably, *Our Lips Are Sealed*. This co-written gem with The Go-Go's Jane Wiedlin, with whom Hall had a short-lived romance, went on to be a hit for her own girlband, too.

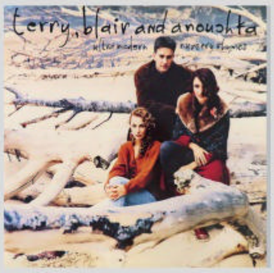
Helmed by David Byrne, apparently the group's second choice of producer after Brian Eno turned them down, *Waiting* isn't as big a leap forward as its predecessor.

Murder She Said finds the trio paying homage to the theme from Margaret Rutherford's Miss Marple films of the 60s, perhaps a sign Dammers' penchant for easy listening had rubbed off more than they'd admit. *The Pressure Of Life (Takes The Weight Off The Body)*, meanwhile, harked back to the bouncy ska of The Specials' debut.

Perhaps mindful they'd run their course, Hall again moved on, leaving Fun Boy Three as one of the decade's most curious two-album wonders.

WAITING

Released 1983
Label Chrysalis
Chart Positions
UK No.14 US No.104



For "people who can hum a tune whilst hoovering". That's how Blair Booth, who, alongside future psychoanalyst and writer Anouchka Grose joined Hall's most carefree side project, described their sole album *Ultra Modern Nursery Rhymes*.

It's a fair comment. Bonded by their love of 60s pop – their first single was a cover of Captain & Tennille's *Love Will Keep Us Together* – Terry, Blair And Anouchka served up a sound as refreshingly simple as their moniker and often, every bit as catchy as the Shake'n'Vac jingle.

The opening title track, for instance, is a reassuring piece of fatherly advice on the pressures of life which threatens to burst into the theme to *Red Dwarf*. Lead single *Missing* is the kind of witty kitchen sink portrait The Beautiful South topped the charts with that same year. And *Three Cool Catz* is a doo-wop take on Leiber & Stoller's standard whose title essentially sums up the whole project.

Indeed, so out of the cultural loop, Anouchka initially thought it was Jerry Hall who wanted a guitarist and declined. Blair, who would later form *Break From The Old Routine* hitmakers Oui 3, was impressed that she didn't know who Terry was. However, together they appear to be having a blast on a retro flight of fancy which charms and delights in equal measure. And remarkably, so does Terry.

ULTRA MODERN NURSERY RHYMES

Released 1990
Label Chrysalis
Chart Position
Did not chart

The COLOUR FIELD
VIRGINS and PHILISTINES

Named after a mid-15th century form of abstract artwork, The Colourfield (initially The Colour Field) saw Hall distance himself slightly from the monochromatic persona that had guided his previous two outfits to chart success. He could still rival Morrissey when it came to lyrical bitterness, of course. "But me and the cat own the lease on the flat and nothing you do will ever change that," he sneers at an ex-girlfriend for having the audacity to leave on *Take*. And he can hardly contain his resentment on the animal activism of *Cruel Circus* ("Fur coats on ugly people/ Expensively dressed up to kill/ In a sport that's legal/ Within the minds of the mentally ill").

However, joined by guitarist Toby Lyons and bass player Karl Shale, who'd both plied their trade in another Coventry-based ska act, The Swinging Cats, *Virgins And Philistines* also offers some light to go with all the shade. "I don't detest everything, just most things," Hall said on *Music Box TV*, arguably the closest he ever came to expressing a sense of optimism.

Album opener *Thinking Of You*, which features backing vocals from big fan (and apparently studio cleaner) Katrina Phillips, surrounds its pleas for a lost love with the kind of orchestral pop that made Burt Bacharach and Hal David the most in-demand songwriters of the 60s. *Castles In The Air* combines open-road soft rock with flourishes of flamenco, while *Hammond Song* turns folk rock trio The Roches' original into a lushly harmonised affair that's reminiscent of vintage Simon And Garfunkel.

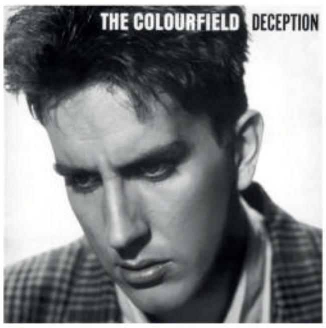
Although much of *Virgins And Philistines* harks back to the sounds of Hall's youth, there are shades of the jangle-pop movement that just a year later would coalesce on the C86 cassette, perhaps a sign that Hugh Jones had more of an influence than fellow co-producer Jeremy Green.

Appearing to believe this was one musical reinvention too many, a select few Hall fans reacted to The Colourfield's first live shows with constant heckles. A philistine response, you could say, to an album which painted the eternal miserabilist in refreshingly expressive strokes.

> *VIRGINS AND PHILISTINES* PAINTED THE ETERNAL MISERABILIST HALL IN REFRESHINGLY EXPRESSIVE STROKES

VIRGINS AND PHILISTINES

Released 1985
Label Chrysalis
Chart Position
UK No.12



Hall had called it a day with his previous two outfits at a point in which audiences were left wanting more. The fact that The Colourfield's difficult second album barely scraped the UK's Top 100 and, in a career first, spawned zero Top 40 singles suggests that the musical wanderer should have pressed the cease-and-desist button even earlier third time around.

The band appeared to have been just as dissatisfied as their fans. Shale left the project midway through recording, while Hall failed to establish a connection with both the session musicians brought in as his replacement and producers Jeffrey Lesser (The Chieftains) and Richard Gottehrer (Blondie).

Deception's troubled backstory, therefore, suggests that it's an album of car crash proportions. But while it's undoubtedly slicker and glossier than anything its frontman did before – and after, too – it also boasts several tracks worthy of gracing a Hall Best Of.

Confession, one of the two tracks on the LP that feature Tears For Fears' Roland Orzabal, and *Heart Of America* both echo the well-crafted pop that would turn cult heroes Aztec Camera and Prefab Sprout into chart concerns just a year later.

Adding to Hall's list of unlikely cover versions, the emphatic funk of Sly And The Family Stone's *Running Away* proved he could still push himself out of his comfort zone. And *Miss Texas 1967* is a gorgeously melancholic piece of lounge pop about an old-school beauty queen, which suggests that the great pessimist Hall was an ardent viewer of prime-time television soap opera, *Dallas*.

There are signs elsewhere, however, that Hall had lost his mojo, and not just the glum front cover portrait, either: the album's anodyne cover of The Monkees' *She*, for example, or the synthetic soul of *Digging It Deep* which succumbed to all the worst excesses of late-80s productions as well as the 'moon in June' approach to lyrics ("Oh how I wish I loved the human race/ Oh how I wish I had a pretty face… I'm glad and lazy/ And you're sad and crazy"). After six albums in eight years, Hall perhaps wisely took a lengthy break toward the end of the decade that he'd helped to define.

> THERE ARE SIGNS THAT HALL HAD LOST HIS MOJO – AND NOT JUST THE GLUM FRONT COVER PORTRAIT

DECEPTION

Released 1987
Label Chrysalis
Chart Position
UK No.95

TERRY HALL HOME

After 15 years and five different group projects, Hall finally decided to go solo in 1994, albeit with a little help from many of his peers. Indeed, *Home*'s credits read like a who's who of 1980s guitar pop, with Nick Heyward, The Smiths' Craig Gannon as well as XTC's Andy Partridge all joining producer Ian Broudie on songwriting duties and The Icicle Works' drummer Chris Sharrock and Echo And The Bunnymen's bassist Les Pattinson lending a hand in the studio.

The Britpop movement, that in the wake of *Definitely Maybe* and *Parklife* was fast reaching its commercial zenith, was also keen to get on board, too. Blur's Damon Albarn guested on *Chasing A Rainbow*, the soaring indie-pop number added to its special edition a year later, while Pulp's Jarvis Cocker remixed opening lead single *Forever J*, a bittersweet paean to Hall's soon-to-be ex-wife Jeanette which immediately set the classicist pop tone.

Despite its star-studded pedigree, the LP once again saw Hall languishing in the lower reaches of the UK's Top 100, perhaps the biggest chart injustice of the journeyman's career considering how effortlessly it aligned with the Cool Britannia era.

Sense, a slightly grittier version of The Lightning Seeds tune he had co-written two years previously, was also robbed of a Top 40 place. But the album's true highlights are elsewhere: the sweeping cinematic power pop of *What's Wrong With Me*, the ode to loneliness of grammatical nightmare *I Don't Got You*, the bitter kiss-off *I Drew A Lemon* in which Hall proves he's not entirely averse to the odd dad joke ("I thought we'd last forever/ But you drew the curtains/ And pulled yourself together"). The coquettish female harmonies that permeate *No No No* and *First Attack Of Love* bring to mind the vocal interplay of The Human League. While *You* boasts one of Hall's finest zingers ("If ifs and ands were pots and pans, you'd be a kitchen"). On paper, *Home* is only a minor footnote in the restless creative's career, and yet, as his most consistently strong body of work, it's arguably something of a lost classic.

HOME IS ONLY A FOOTNOTE IN THE RESTLESS CREATIVE'S CAREER, AND YET IS SOMETHING OF A LOST CLASSIC

HOME
Released 1994
Label Anxious Records
Chart Position
UK No.95

Terry HALL
Laugh

Having waited such a long time to go it alone, Hall struck while the iron was relatively hot by releasing his second solo album just three years after his first. Co-produced with Craig Gannon together with future Rolling Stones cohort Cenzo Townshend, the ironically-titled *Laugh* is a little more downbeat than its predecessor, no doubt reflecting the fact the star was still recovering from a painful divorce.

Adding The High Llamas frontman Sean O'Hagan to his impressive list of collaborators, *Happy Go Lucky* is a mournful piece of chamber pop which plays out like a relationship post-mortem. Channelling Pulp in their Britpop prime, *Ballad Of A Landlord* is a scathing riposte to a former lover who's discovered that the grass isn't always greener on the other side ("How I long to taste the secrets/ From your land of phoney tears"). The title of Damon Albarn co-write *A Room Full Of Nothing*, an unhinged waltz which captures the Britpop comedown as effectively as Blur's self-titled LP from earlier in the year, says it all.

Even the songs which on the surface appear to be full of hope are, in fact, drenched in despair. The Byrds-esque *Summer Follows Spring* sound is tailor-made for a romantic walk in the park, but is yet another smackdown to a cheating ex. And the similarly jangly *Sonny And His Sister*, co-penned with long-time fan Stephen Duffy, is about a man left so adrift by a break-up that he seeks advice from a teen magazine's problems page.

Laugh does end on a slightly more optimistic note, a buoyant cover of Todd Rundgren's soft rock serenade *I Saw The Light* which is perfectly in keeping with the album's classic radio vibes. But failing to find catharsis in such soul-baring ("I thought, 'Why am I putting myself through this?'" he later told *The Guardian*. "I mean, I can avoid doing this"), Hall acknowledged that the singer-songwriter approach wasn't for him. Indeed, although *Laugh* became his highest-charting LP since The Colourfield's debut, his solo career met the same two-albums-and-out fate, now his forte.

EVEN THE SONGS WHICH ON THE SURFACE APPEAR TO BE FULL OF HOPE ARE, IN FACT, DRENCHED IN DESPAIR

LAUGH
Released 1997
Label Southsea Bubble Company
Chart Position
UK No.50

Out of all Hall's many creative endeavours, Vegas appears to be the one lost to time. Only a handful of its 10 tracks have racked up more than a few thousand Spotify streams, and it's largely been impossible to obtain a physical copy since its 1992 release. That's a little surprising considering it did spawn his final UK Top 40 hit (*Possessed*) and was spearheaded by a man who, back in the early 80s, had done for synth-pop what Hall had done for ska.

Vegas was born out of a songwriting session with Dave Stewart for the Ramones, but there's little in the way of primitive rock'n'roll on an album which is more Caribbean island than CBGBs.

Walk Into The Wind is a hushed reggae number which reunites Hall with Siobhan Fahey to haunting effect. *Wise Guy* evolves from stately chamber music to beachside dub complete with a chuckling toaster pontificating on the fleeting nature of fame. *Whisper* it quietly and *Take Me For What I Am* could even be mistaken for UB40 back in their chart-topping prime. More in keeping with Stewart's Eurythmics days, the squelchy electronica of *The Thought Of You* and a curious rendition of Charles Aznavour's classic chanson *She* appear to have wandered in from a different side project altogether. But while hardly Hall's most essential album, *Vegas* still strikes it rich.

VEGAS
Released 1992
Label BMG
Chart Position
Did not chart

TERRY HALL & MUSHTAQ
THE HOUR OF TWO LIGHTS

Perhaps inspired by regular collaborator Damon Albarn's world music ventures, in 2003 Hall teamed up with Mushtaq of ethno-techno outfit Fun-Da-Mental for an audacious East-meets-West affair released through the Blur frontman's Honest Jon's label.

The Hour Of Two Lights also roped in everyone from 12-year-old Lebanese singer Nathalie Barghach and 70-something clarinettist Eddie Mordue to Algerian blind rapper Oujdi and Polish gypsy folkies Romany Rad on 11 eclectic tracks living up to the "contemporary nomad music" promised by the duo.

Hall occasionally takes centrestage, as on *A Tale Of Woe*, a sardonic oompah band ditty about life under an oppressive regime, and the brooding trip-hop of *Stand Together*, which exemplifies the pair's idealistic approach to world politics. But it's the globe-trotting guest vocals – Abdul Latif Assaly's haunting cries on *The Silent Wail*, in particular – as well as Mushtaq's multi-cultural production that leaves a lasting impression.

Therefore, Hall often finds himself in the rare position of being a supporting player on his own LP, the last to bear his name for 16 years. Still, this daring collision of sounds proved that nearly a quarter-century into his career, he was still anything but predictable.

THE HOUR OF TWO LIGHTS
Released 2003
Label Honest Jon's/ EMI
Chart Position Did not chart

THE SPECIALS
ENCORE

After they reunited – without their founding member Jerry Dammers, of course – in 2008, The Specials spent over a decade traversing down memory lane before realising, as Horace Panter succinctly put it to *Bass Player* magazine, they "were in danger of becoming the Best Specials Tribute Band In The World."

2019's *Encore* was the remedy, a hotchpotch of cover versions, re-recordings and originals which added to their discography for the first time since 2001's *Conquering Ruler*.

Only Panter remained from that album's similarly trimmed-down line-up, with Hall and Lynval Golding replacing Neville Staple and Roddy Byers on 10 tracks which unexpectedly returned Coventry's finest to the top of the charts. While the public welcomed *Encore* with open arms, Dammers was far from happy, believing that any fresh material not blessed by his presence would destroy the ska legends' legacy.

With several new songs that would sit comfortably on any greatest hits collection, that certainly didn't turn out to be the case. As its name suggests, *B.L.M.* is a powerful anti-racism anthem which finds Golding reflecting on his father's experiences as a Windrush immigrant. *10 Commandments* answers back to Prince Buster's same-named display of misogyny with defiant spoken word from Saffiyah Khan, the political activist who famously rallied against an EDL demo sporting a Specials T-shirt.

Meanwhile *The Life And Times (Of A Man Called Depression)* sees Hall dissect his own mental health on a woozy mix of spoken word and 60s lounge.

Apart from the taut funk of The Equals' *Black Skin Blue Eyed Boys*, the more familiar offerings are less inspiring. Renditions of Fun Boy Three's *The Lunatics*... and The Valentines' *Blam Blam Fever*, the latter already tackled on the band's previous LP, suggest they were cherrypicking from a limited songbook, too.

Yet there's nothing here to besmirch The Specials' name. Indeed, as closer *We Sell Hope*, a wistful reggae number which essentially summarises their whole ethos ("We've gotta take care of each other/ Do what you need to do/ Without making others suffer") draws to an end, all but their former leader may well be left shouting "Encore".

AS CLOSER *WE SELL HOPE* DRAWS TO AN END, ALL BUT THE SPECIALS' FORMER LEADER MAY WELL BE LEFT SHOUTING "ENCORE"

ENCORE
Released 2019
Label UMG
Chart Position
UK No.1

THE SPECIALS
PROTEST SONGS 1924 - 2012

After the double whammy of writer's block and the global pandemic put paid to a planned album of roots reggae, The Specials instead chose to follow their unlikely studio comeback by essentially holding up a collection of musical placards.

Unlike Chumbawamba's similarly-themed 1988 album *English Rebel Songs*, the trio mostly looked across the pond for protest inspiration: hence campfire spiritual *I Don't Mind Failing In This World* sits alongside Bob Marley and The Wailers' call-to-arms *Get Up, Stand Up*, Rod McKuen's anti-Vietnam War tale *Soldiers Who Want To Be Heroes* and The Staple Singers' gospel classic *Freedom Highway*.

The Specials' "urge to rail against what is wrong with the world" also veers into some unlikely places. Quite how Jerry McCain's *My Next Door Neighbor*, a prime slice of rockabilly whose only gripes concern the borrowing of household appliances, fits the theme remains anyone's guess. Meanwhile, Leonard Cohen's *Everybody Knows*, treated to a smoky jazz rendition here by Hall at his most debonair, is only here due to its prominence in an Australian anti-smoking ad.

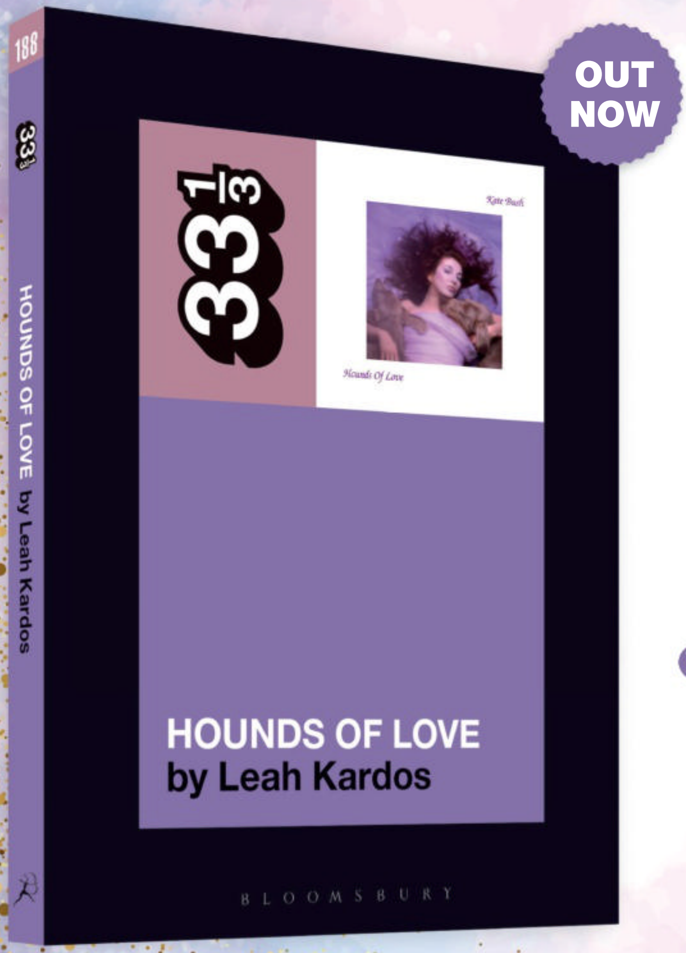
Protest Songs works best when it provides an element of surprise: the band have never sounded as energised as on the straightforward garage rock of *Trouble Every Day*, Frank Zappa's dissection of the Watts Riots in Los Angeles. Bradford vocalist Hannah Hu helps turn the anti-imperialism of Talking Heads' *Listening Wind* into a ghostly blues-folk number which evokes PJ Harvey at her most intense.

And the oldest composition here, civil rights favourite *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Us Around*, is given the handclap a capella treatment before being skanked up halfway through.

Tragically, this century-spanning affair ended up serving as Hall's swansong: 14 months on, he died from pancreatic cancer at just 63, leaving behind a remarkable body of work that was continually shifting in scope and sound. "Our beautiful friend, brother and one of the most brilliant singers, songwriters and lyricists this country has ever produced," remarked Golding and Panter in a tribute that few could protest.

THE SPECIALS CHOSE TO FOLLOW THEIR UNLIKELY COMEBACK BY HOLDING UP MUSICAL PLACARDS

PROTEST SONGS 1924-2012
Released 2021
Label UMG
Chart Position
UK No.2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2025 The year ahead

WE TAKE A LOOK INTO OUR CRYSTAL BALL TO SERVE UP MUSIC HIGHLIGHTS ACROSS THE NEXT 12 MONTHS FROM *CLASSIC POP*'S FAVOURITE ARTISTS

MARK LINDORES

Looking back over the past 12 months in music, the immediate takeaway has been how 2024 was the year of the ladies. From Taylor's globe-straddling Eras Tour to the zeitgeist-grabbing dominance of Chappell and Charli – everyone from *Vogue* to *Newsweek* celebrated the brat summer – there's also been career highs from Beyoncé, Billie and Ariana, plus an onstage union of Madonna and Kylie to celebrate International Women's Day. It's clear that girl power is alive and well.

No Doubt reformed to play at Coachella – hopefully Emily Eavis has called Gwen Stefani to accept her offer of repeating their set at Glastonbury – and Girls Aloud's triumphant return was the perfect celebration of their legacy, which encompassed a loving tribute to Sarah Harding.

In terms of reunions, 2025 is shaping up to be a vintage year thanks to news of Scissor Sisters and Oasis hitting the UK's stages next summer. We're particularly excited, too, for Kylie's first headlining tour since 2018, the now annual summer of Bruce Springsteen and the finales of ELO and Cyndi Lauper, the latter being the icon's first major set of shows in a decade.

While the live setting is thriving with bands getting back together, some of next year's most eagerly awaited new music comes from artists breaking away from their respective motherships, with The Killers' Brandon Flowers, Maneskin's Damiano David and Little Mix's Jade Thirlwall all ready to unleash solo material.

Kicking off 2025 in January and February respectively will be new albums from FKA Twigs and Lady Gaga, both no doubt keen to put their recent box office disasters – *The Crow* and *Joker 2* – behind them. The secret to music/film crossover success appears to be not appearing in the movie and licensing your music instead – just ask Sophie Ellis-Bextor.

We'd usually highlight the lengthy wait between albums from various artists here, but with a new Cure LP and a song from Sade, plus word that something may be coming from Kate Bush, it's over to you Rihanna...

© Ruven Afanador

© Andy Vella

THE CURE

While the general consensus among the immeasurably patient fans of The Cure is that their recent eight-track opus *Songs Of A Lost World* has been well worth the 16-year wait, the Godfathers Of Gloom have assured us that a follow-up is already on the horizon.

Speaking recently with Radio 2, Robert Smith outlined plans for 2025 and beyond, which include at least one more album, a documentary, as well as a lengthy touring schedule, taking them up to the band's 50th anniversary in 2028. "We'll start up again next year – I have to finish the second album," Smith said. "We were going to play festivals next year, but then I decided that the next time we go out on stage will be autumn. Then we'll probably be playing quite regularly through until the next anniversary – the 2028 anniversary."

Madonna

Since wrapping her career-spanning Celebration Tour in front of a record-breaking 1.6 million fans on Rio's Copacabana Beach in May this year, things have been quiet for the Queen Of Pop career-wise following a string of personal tragedies, including the death of her brother Christopher, who served as creative director on some of her most spectacular stage productions including The Girlie Show and Blond Ambition Tour.

Sensibly, following her own brush with death in June 2023, Madonna is said to be taking a more leisurely approach to work and has sporadically been in the studio writing new material. An Instagram post revealing she had reunited with *Confessions On A Dance Floor* producer Stuart Price sparked fan frenzy and much speculation over what they were cooking up. A film of the Celebration Tour – of which Price was musical director – or a *Confessions...* 20th anniversary reissue were touted as possibilities, until eagle-eyed fans uncovered what appeared to be unknown song lyrics in Madonna's notebook, seemingly confirming work had begun on her 15th studio album – her first since 2019's *Madame X*. At six years, this will be the longest gap between studio albums in her career. Maybe now would be the perfect time to release those promised deluxe editions while we wait...

© Ricardo Gomes

© Erik Melvin

Kylie

Having delivered a second instalment of her *Tension* album in October, the Princess Of Pop has plenty of new material for when it comes to compiling the setlist of her forthcoming world tour, which kicks off in Australia in January.

Minogue's biggest jaunt in more than a decade and including some of her largest headline shows in the US to date, the tour will keep Kylie on the road for much of the year. However, as a self-confessed slave to her portable studio, the pop icon may well be readying new material between shows. The singer recently revealed that she was already envisioning a stylistic shift for her next album, having been inspired by an exploration of her career archives for a forthcoming documentary and book. "I feel like it's time for something – maybe not as singular as [1998's] *Impossible Princess*, but to bring some experimentalism back in," she recently told *NME*. "I'm not sure how much of what I'm working on is because of where my output has been of late. We've been pretty solid on 'What's the hit, what's the hit, what's the hit'. So, it's some of that slightly meatier kind of other stuff that I'm really drawn to."

OASIS

Whatever the reasoning for the Gallaghers finally putting an end to their long-running feud, Noel and Liam are promising it'll be strictly sibling revelry when they take to the stage for their much-anticipated comeback tour next summer. Although it's a touring arrangement only at this point with no new music planned, the public's appetite for the return of Oasis is sure to inspire at least a few studio sessions if the brothers are still speaking at the end of the live shows stint.

Richard Ashcroft and Cast are confirmed as special guests for Oasis shows in the UK but if you weren't lucky enough to score a dynamically priced ticket, Supergrass, Ocean Colour Scene, Skunk Anansie, Shed Seven and Stereophonics all have major tours lined up for next year, too.

© Munachi Osegbu

Sparks

Now 53 years on from their debut album, Sparks are experiencing one of the most successful periods of their entire career – both creatively and commercially – with the duo's last three LPs all having reached the UK Top 10.

After a hugely successful world tour, Ron and Russell Mael holed up in their Los Angeles studio almost immediately and completed the bulk of their next album in six months. Speaking to *Mojo*, Ron explained that despite their ages and stage of their careers, this is not the album on which Sparks get contemplative. "I think that the assumption for a band that has been around for as long and made as many albums as we have – I won't mention years – is that we would be introspective and mellow down a touch," he says. "You know, the usual things where musicians try to come to grips with mortality and all those sorts of things. We're not like that. It still has a pretty high degree of aggression to it." As well as the album, the duo are also planning another tour and continuing work on their movie musical, *X-Crucior*.

Sparks recently saw 50th anniversary reissues of their *Kimono My House* and *Propaganda* albums released via Demon on picture disc and 140g vinyl.

© Marcus Maschwitz

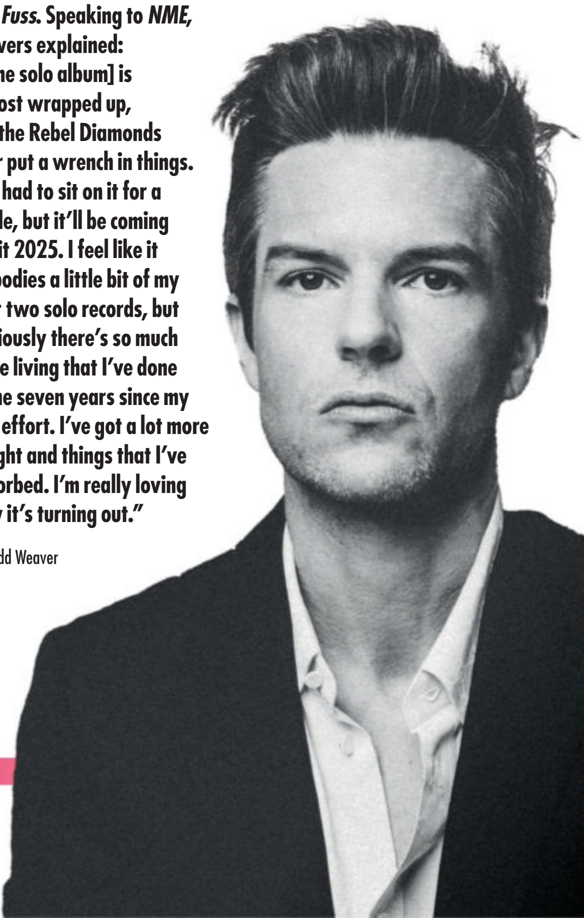
Nik Kershaw

A prolific road warrior, Kershaw hadn't even completed his recent 1984 Tour, which saw him perform his hit albums *Human Racing* and *The Riddle* in their entirety, before he announced a mammoth trek across the UK for late next year. Billed as the Musings And Lyrics Tour, the shows will see Nik playing smaller venues to deliver "an evening of songs, stories and silliness".

The tour will coincide with the publication of Kershaw's book in the autumn, *I Won't Let The Sun Go Down On Me*, which will see the singer-songwriter detail his four-decade career – both his own huge hits as well as collaborations with Chesney Hawkes, Gary Barlow, Sia and Bonnie Tyler among others. In a statement, Nik said the tour "will be a lovely opportunity to share some of my funniest, most personal memories of 40 years in the music business."

BRANDON FLOWERS

Originally planned to be released in 2024, The Killers frontman's third solo album was delayed so that the Las Vegas rockers could spend much of the year on the road in support of their greatest hits collection, *Rebel Diamonds*, and special shows commemorating the 20th anniversary of the band's debut album, *Hot Fuss*. Speaking to *NME*, Flowers explained: "[The solo album] is almost wrapped up, but the Rebel Diamonds Tour put a wrench in things. I've had to sit on it for a while, but it'll be coming out it 2025. I feel like it embodies a little bit of my first two solo records, but obviously there's so much more living that I've done in the seven years since my last effort. I've got a lot more insight and things that I've absorbed. I'm really loving how it's turning out."



© Todd Weaver

Sophie Ellis-Bextor

Following the whirlwind resurgence of 2001's *Murder On The Dancefloor* after its use in *Saltburn* that featured a naked Barry Keoghan dancing to the track, 2025 will see Sophie Ellis-Bextor leaving the kitchen disco firmly behind to hit the road for her biggest ever UK tour and the release of new album *The Invisible Line.* The LP will be her first for new label Decca and is billed as "a confident return to her iconic and esteemed disco-pop sound". Sophie has been in the studio in between touring the world and supporting Take That and The Human League with a dream team of talent. As well as Biff Stannard and Duck Blackwell, who co-wrote first single *Freedom Of The Night,* Ellis-Bextor has been working with long-term collaborator Ed Harcourt plus Nile Rodgers, Richard X, Hot Chip, Little Boots and Cathy Dennis.

© Phil Sharp

ERASURE

After sharing an Instagram post back in May with the caption "Plotting and planning", Andy Bell and Vince Clarke recently reunited in the US to confirm plans for a new Erasure album with work due to begin in January. Both have been separately prepping material and Andy has also begun work on a solo project with DJ/producer Dave Aude. However, the focus for 2025 is Erasure's 20th studio album, which also coincides with their 40th anniversary as a band. Speaking on *The Randy Report* podcast, Bell revealed Clarke had attended one of his US solo gigs to sync their schedules. "Vince and I met up after my show in San Diego and we are going to be writing together in January," the singer explained. "We're getting ready to put out the new album and have some special guests on there which I'm not allowed to talk about yet, but it's so exciting. You won't believe it!"

© Sienna Eve Anderson

BLONDIE

The pop-punk legends have confirmed the band's new album, their first since 2017's *Pollinator,* will be released in early 2025. Sharing the news on Instagram with a black-and-white photo of Debbie Harry reclining in the studio with a simple caption, "New Blondie album next year", Chris Stein's post seemingly confirms completion of the LP. Though details of the record are being kept under wraps, drummer Clem Burke recently revealed that Stein, who has been absent from the band's live shows for the past couple of years, had been "very active" in the creation of the record and that Glen Matlock, who has toured with Blondie as bass player since 2022, had also written a song for the album. "We're considering a few special ways to promote [the new LP], such as residencies around the world and possibly a video album project similar to what we did with the *Eat To The Beat* album," Burke told the Psychedelic Baby website. He also revealed that he's completed his autobiography, due to be published by Harper Collins in autumn 2025.

Jade Thirlwall

The final member of Little Mix to strike out on her own, Thirlwall's solo work so far has established her as an ardent student of what makes a great pop star and someone unafraid to wear her influences proudly. Whether it's releasing the weirdly wonderful *Angel Of My Dreams* as her debut single or tapping up legendary image-maker David LaChapelle (Britney, Christina, Madonna) to create the *Soul Train*-meets-Stephen King visuals for the irresistibly slinky *Fantasy*, Thirlwall's pop pedigree ensures that hers will be one of the most eagerly awaited and exciting debuts of 2025. Describing the sound of her album as "chaotic", Thirlwall told *Beat* magazine that it's "a culmination of all the people that I grew up listening to – Madonna, Britney, Kylie, Janet and Diana Ross. I'm obsessed with pop, I always will be, so my approach was how do I become the next pop girlie that stands out and has something different."

Lady Gaga

Though the release of Lady Gaga's seventh studio album is being touted as her major comeback, she's laid some decent foundations in 2024. *Die With A Smile*, her duet with Bruno Mars, became one of the biggest hits of the year and *Happy Mistake*, the sole original composition on her *Harlequin* album, was the highlight of the *Joker 2: Folies A Deux* debacle. Due to be released in February, Gaga's album, which she described on Instagram as "some of the best music I've written in as long as I can remember", has seen her work with Andrew Watt and Cirkut to create the dark, industrial soundscape exemplified on first single *Disease* – a throwback to 90s-era Nine Inch Nails – and a serial killer-obsessed rocker that shall not be named. As well as the album, having bade farewell to Vegas, Gaga is strongly rumoured to be undertaking a mammoth world tour in 2025.

© Danny Clinch

© Alex Lake

MANIC STREET PREACHERS

Exactly 40 years after Manic Street Preachers wrote their first song – the Miners' Strike tale of *Aftermath* – Wales' finest return in January with the appropriately titled *Critical Thinking*, something the band have never shied away from in their four-decade career. Their 15th album is, according to a statement from bassist Nicky Wire, "a record of opposites colliding – of dialectics trying to find a path of resolution. While the music has an effervescence and an elegiac uplift, most of the words deal with the cold analysis of the self, the exception being the three lyrics by James [Dean Bradfield] which look for and hopefully find answers in people, their memories, language and beliefs.

"There are crises at the heart of these songs." he continues. "They are microcosms of scepticism and suspicion, the drive to the internal seems inevitable – start with yourself, maybe the rest will follow." Their UK tour kicks off next April.

© Danny Clifford

SQUEEZE

Not many bands celebrate their 50th anniversary with not one but two new albums, but then Squeeze aren't most bands. Having spent much of 2024 on the road, Chris Difford and Glenn Tilbrook are now planning to revisit a selection of cassette demos known as *Trixie's* from 1974. "When I listen to them now, I hear young men, very ambitious, striking out musically and lyrically in a way which was extraordinary for our age," Difford told azcentral.com. "I'd say the music was very inspired by Sparks in those days. Possibly Queen even. It's kind of an interesting mixture of songs."

Equally exciting, are a batch of new tracks that could potentially form a studio album swansong. "The stuff that we're writing, I think it's incredible," Difford enthused to *Classic Pop* earlier this year. "I don't know if we're going to do another record after this, so I want this to be the best record we've ever done. I mean, why do one if it's not going to be the best you can possibly do?"

© Charlotte Patmore

SAM FENDER

The Geordie rocker's new LP *People Watching* has been confirmed for an early 2025 release before a mammoth world tour. Fender debuted two new songs, the title track and *Nostalgia's Lie*, at a gig in Plymouth this summer. Speaking on Sky Arts' *Johnson And Knopfler's Music Legends* series, Fender explained why the follow-up to 2021's *Seventeen Going Under* has taken longer to arrive. "For the second one, we rushed to get that out and the third one we started rushing and I thought... I'd rather it be late and great than early and shit."

Newcastle singer-songwriter Brooke Bentham joins Fender's band for the new record: "Her voice is all over the new album," Sam revealed.

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

Harry Styles, Beyoncé, Jamiroquai, Saint Etienne, Sugababes, Lana Del Rey, Mariah Carey, Chappell Roan, Sade and Stevie Nicks. ■

SONGS OF A LOST WORLD

the CURE

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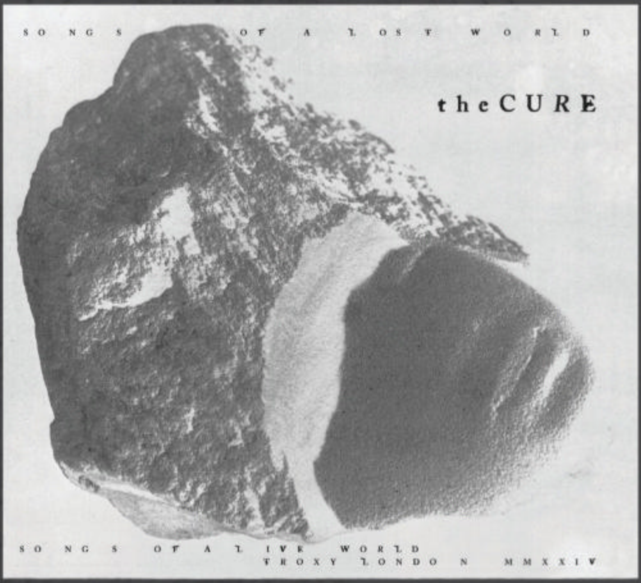
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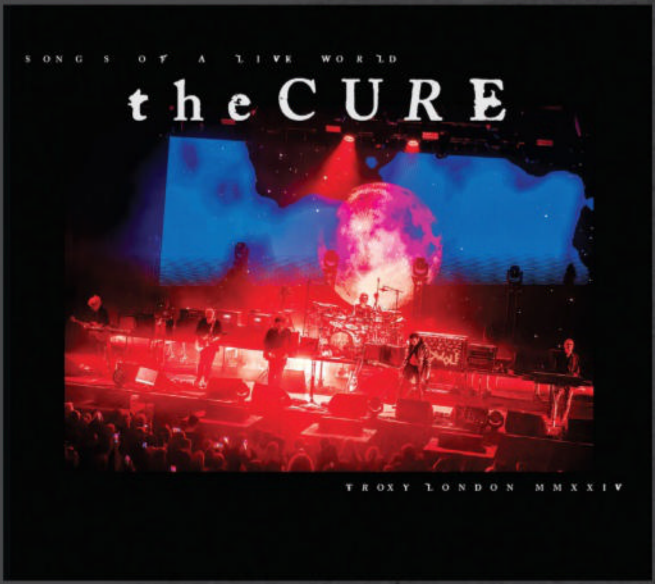
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CLASSIC POP

TOP TEN

WEEK ENDING 13 JANUARY 1979

A TRIO OF DISCO PERENNIALS, A LOVELORN STAR DUET, A NOVELTY COVER AND THE BLOCKHEADS AT THEIR BEST

STEVE O'BRIEN

01 (1) **Y.M.C.A.**
THE VILLAGE PEOPLE
(MERCURY)

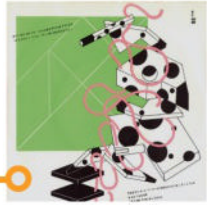
02 ▲ (6) **HIT ME WITH YOUR RHYTHM STICK**
IAN DURY & THE BLOCKHEADS
(STIFF)

Y.M.C.A.
THE VILLAGE PEOPLE
(MERCURY)

As any right-on Gen Z-er will tell you, the world of 1979 was awash with racists, misogynists and homophobes, and that any expression of sexual difference was brutally suppressed by 'the man'. But was it really so? Exhibit A in the era's defence is this jubilant love letter to the joys of the Young Men's Christian Association, a place where "they have everything for young men to enjoy" and where "you can hang out with all the boys..." Sure, more innocent listeners may have thought the Construction Worker, the GI, the Native American, the Biker, the Cowboy and the Police Officer were singing about hanging out with their mates for LOLs, but more knowing ears knew what was up. In the years since its release, *Y.M.C.A.* has become something of a Gay Anthem (™), being played regularly at US sporting events and even spun on the STS-106 Space Shuttle as the astronauts' wake-up call. Altogether now: "It's fun to stay at the YMCA...!"

SONG FOR GUY
ELTON JOHN
(ROCKET)

Elton John hadn't had a Top 10 hit for well over two years by the time *Song For Guy* hit its chart peak of UK No.4. (*Don't Go Breaking My Heart*, a duet with Kiki Dee, had topped the hit parade in 1976). Not that anyone who caught *Song For Guy* on the wireless in 1979 would have necessarily known that they were listening to the man behind such hits as *Rocket Man* and *Pinball Wizard*. Elton's voice only appears on this one ever so subtly – it's mostly an instrumental number, taken from the singer's 12th album, *A Single Man*, the first of John's LPs not to feature the wordsmithery of regular collaborator Bernie Taupin (Gary Osborne was on lyric duty). Later, the song was used to soundtrack the BBC sitcom *Happy Families* (Ade Edmondson played a character named Guy), while more recently it popped up in an episode of *The Crown*, during a scene where Lady Di dances by herself in a Buckingham Palace ballroom.



HIT ME WITH YOUR RHYTHM STICK
IAN DURY & THE BLOCKHEADS
(STIFF)

The first and only chart-topper for Ian Dury & The Blockheads, *Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick* was penned by Dury and the band's Chaz Jankel at the singer's home in Kent. According to Will Birch's *Ian Dury: The Definitive Biography*, when the track was finally completed, Jankel phoned his mother and told her that he had just written his "first No.1!" Dury didn't like featuring single releases on his albums, so *Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick* was left off the Blockheads' next LP, May 1979's *Do It Yourself*, though it was included on a 1996 reissue. Jankel was also responsible, with Dury, for *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll* and *Reasons To Be Cheerful, Part 3*. More surprisingly, he's also the co-writer of the Quincy Jones disco hit *Ai No Corrida*.

LAY YOUR LOVE ON ME
RACEY
(RAK)

A reminder that the charts of 1979 weren't just made up of disco and New Wave and that punk hadn't totally obliterated the holiday camp pop that had peppered the hit parade in the first half of the decade. Formed in 1976, Racey's first single, *Baby It's You*, had been penned by Smokie members Chris Norman and Pete Spencer, only it tanked. They had more luck with their second 45, *Lay Your Love On Me*, which had been written for the band by the hitmaking team of Mike Chapman and Nicky Chinn (*Tiger Feet*, *Block Buster!*, *The Ballroom Blitz*). Produced by Mickie Most, it's as inoffensive as a fondant fancy, something that was reflected in the band's on-stage attire, which rather made them look like they were cosplaying Keith Barron in the TV sitcom *Duty Free*. Their next release, *Some Girls*, would be their highest-charting single, just missing the top spot a few months later.

03 (3) **LAY YOUR LOVE ON ME**
RACEY
(RAK)

▲ **04** (5) **SONG FOR GUY**
ELTON JOHN
(ROCKET)

▲ **05** (18) **SEPTEMBER**
EARTH, WIND & FIRE
(CBS)

▼ **06** (4) **A TASTE OF AGGRO**
THE BARRON KNIGHTS
(EPIC)

▼ **07** (2) **MARY'S BOY CHILD / OH MY LORD**
BONEY M
(ATLANTIC/HANSA)

▼ **08** (7) **YOU DON'T BRING ME FLOWERS**
BARBRA STREISAND AND NEIL DIAMOND
(CBS)

▲ **09** (10) **LE FREAK**
CHIC
(ATLANTIC)

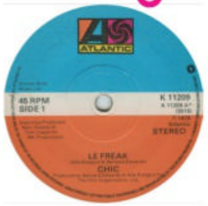
▼ **10** (8) **TOO MUCH HEAVEN**
THE BEE GEES
(RSO)

SEPTEMBER
EARTH, WIND & FIRE (CBS)

Mystifyingly, CBS released this one in November 1978, therefore disqualifying Earth, Wind & Fire from having a hit titled *September* in, well, September. It would, however, be the first UK Top 10 for the Chicago-formed disco-funk outfit and was a No.1 in their native US. It was written by the band's Maurice White and Al McKay with Allee Willis, who would co-pen *What Have I Done To Deserve This?* for Pet Shop Boys and the *Friends* theme, *I'll Be There For You*, for The Rembrandts. The date in the lyrics – 21 September – does not appear to have any real significance, though as bassist Verdine White told *Songfacts*: "People now are getting married on 21 September. The stock market goes up on 21 September. Every kid I know now that is in their twenties, they always thank me because they were born on 21 September."

MARY'S BOY CHILD / OH MY LORD BONEY M
(ATLANTIC/HANSA)

Christmas may have passed, but plenty of record-buyers in the first days of 1979 were still digging Boney M's reworking of Harry Belafonte's Nativity-inspired 1956 hit, *Mary's Boy Child*. A future staple of every iteration of the *Now That's What I Call Christmas* compilation, it wasn't a complete cover – instead, Boney M added a new segment to the song (the "Oh my Lord" bit is added on). According to band vocalist Marcia Barrett in the book *1000 UK Number 1 Hits*: "I always thought of Boney M as being put together by a spiritual force and we liked doing spiritual songs. When we did *Mary's Boy Child*, we added a bit spontaneously at the end. As it worked, we left it in." It certainly did work, with the song tickling the top spot in the UK, Switzerland, Germany, Ireland and Sweden.



LE FREAK
CHIC (ATLANTIC)

We won't repeat the story of how the doorman at Studio 54 inspired the original version of *Le Freak* (we're a family magazine), but in its revised form, the track would become Chic's signature song, so much so that in 2018, it was selected for preservation in the National Recording Registry by the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant". Take that, Studio 54!

TOO MUCH HEAVEN
THE BEE GEES (RSO)

Composed on the same day as *Tragedy* and *Shadow Dancing*, *Too Much Heaven* was written by the Gibb brothers on a break from filming the *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* movie. A satellite from the band's *Spirits Having Flown* album, the royalties from the single – estimated to be in the region of $7 million – were donated to UNICEF.

A TASTE OF AGGRO
THE BARRON KNIGHTS (EPIC)

In years to come there will be academic theses written about why, as a nation, we once thought The Barron Knights were funny. Formed in 1959, by the 1970s this – cough! – comedy band were rarely off the box, amusing unfussy audiences with their witless rewrites of pop hits. *A Taste Of Aggro* would be their joint highest-charting 45, and it parodied three singles from the previous 12 months – *Rivers Of Babylon* by Boney M, *The Smurf Song* by Father Abraham and *Matchstalk Men And Matchstalk Cats And Dogs* by Brian And Michael (sample lyric – to the tune of *Rivers Of Babylon* – "There's a dentist in Birmingham/ He fixed my crown/ And as I slept, he filled my mouth with iron"). Despite 'Weird Al' Yankovic nicking the Knights' schtick in the years since, they're still at it, though only guitarist Pete Langford remains from the original lineup.

YOU DON'T BRING ME FLOWERS
BARBRA STREISAND AND NEIL DIAMOND (CBS)

You Don't Bring Me Flowers was first written as the theme for a sitcom titled *All That Glitters* until producer Norman Lear decided to go in a different direction, after which Neil Diamond plus co-songwriters Alan and Marilyn Bergman expanded it. The song first appeared as a solo track on Diamond's 1977 album *I'm Glad You're Here With Me Tonight* before Barbra Streisand covered it on her *Songbird* LP (1978). These recordings were meshed together by enterprising radio stations, creating a duet, albeit in bootleg form. The success of these versions led to Columbia bringing the pair together for a dual recording.

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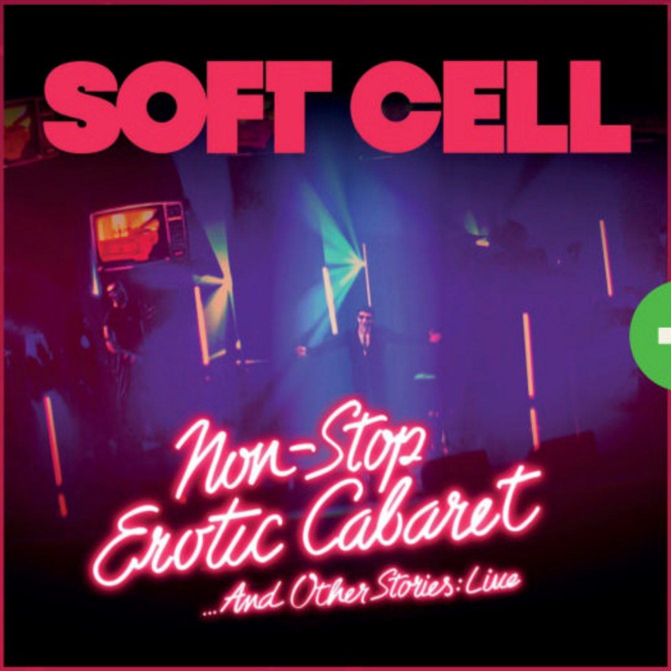
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FRANZ FERDINAND

Franz Ferdinand return with their sixth long-player, *The Human Fear*, "unashamedly going for the pop jugular"

Photo: © Fiona Torre

“WE’RE A STRONG GANG ON A QUEST”

IN THE TWO DECADES SINCE HOOVERING UP BRITS AND THE MERCURY PRIZE WITH THEIR DEBUT LP, FRANZ FERDINAND HAVE REMAINED ENERGETIC AND EXCITABLE, IN LOVE WITH THE POSSIBILITIES OF WHAT A BAND SHOULD BE. ALEX KAPRANOS AND BOB HARDY JOIN US IN MONTERREY TO EXPLAIN POP’S HOLY GRAIL, TRYING TO EMULATE BLACK SABBATH AND FEELING FELINE. JUST DON’T MENTION SNAKES...

JOHN EARLS

Franz Ferdinand mainstays Alex Kapranos and Bob Hardy are so in tune with each other that they even share the same phobia. Over two decades since *Take Me Out* and *The Dark Of The Matinée* launched the Glasgow-based literate pop powerhouses, the pair have remained in thrall to the possibilities of music.

But, with their sixth album entitled *The Human Fear*, it’s natural to get darker and ask what they’re scared of. The pair’s responses reveal the Franz Ferdinand hivemind: they’re both terrified of snakes. Hardy’s most vivid childhood memory is of going to Noah’s Ark, an exhibit on Morecambe beach, aged three. “It was a fake zoo, stuffed with models of animals,” shudders the usually amiable bassist. “The floors and walls were both glass, and one room was full of snakes. I lost it and had to be carried out of there. I can’t stand snakes; I can’t look at them.”

FRANZ FERDINAND
THE HUMAN FEAR

Nodding sympathetically at his bandmate’s story, Kapranos takes up the theme: “When I see a snake, I freeze uncontrollably.” Often holidaying with his Greek grandfather on the island of Salamis, near Athens, the young Alex walked down to his grandad’s pistachio trees one morning. “I paused, flip-flop in mid-air, to see a snake underneath my foot,” he grimaces. “It was one of those moments that lasted seconds but feels like hours, me and the snake looking at each other. It realised I wasn’t going to stand on it and left me alone. My grandfather told me: ‘You would have been dead if it had bitten you.’ That freaked me out even more. So, yeah, I’ve got the same fear as Bob.”

The motivating thrill derived from being scared is a theme of *The Human Fear*, as Kapranos explains: “Overcoming fears can lead to your greatest achievements, like asking someone out on a date. We search out fear to make us feel alive, but *The Human Fear* isn’t a doomy goth record to make you feel afraid.”

It certainly isn’t, but it is an album to make you feel alive. Franz Ferdinand’s first LP since *Always Ascending* in 2018, it’s packed with the propulsive pop that’s been their trademark since debut single *Darts Of Pleasure* in 2003. It’s also

Franz Ferdinand *circa* 2005, (L-R) Alex Kapranos, Paul Thomson, Bob Hardy and Nick McCarthy

the expanded five-piece's first album with guitarist Dino Bardot and drummer Audrey Tait, while keyboardist Julian Corrie had joined the band for *Always Ascending*. It follows the departures of Nick McCarthy in 2016 and Paul Thomson five years later.

"I love the dynamic of the band at the moment," beams Kapranos. "What I love on a record is the sound of five people in a room playing together. When you get a good performance, you're playing in a way that's almost telepathic. Bob and I have played together for over 20 years, but we've really developed with the other three."

Hardy likens the current line-up's relationship to role-playing games, reasoning: "Each character has individual traits that help you along the way. Audrey is a huge fan of pop music, Dino loves 70s prog and Julian brings musical theory and production talents. When it comes together, we create something unique, like we're a strong gang on a quest."

MISSION STATEMENT

Both great enthusiasts who talk at breakneck speed, the pair seem to have lasted so long together by being as excitable as their music. Kapranos believes it goes back to how Franz Ferdinand began: "Most people start bands by jamming together. Bob and I instead started by talking about what a band should be and what we love about bands. As a listener, that's how we approach music, too. We all want to understand what's good about our favourite bands."

"I'm not particularly musical," admits Hardy. "What excites me about being in a band is the potential of what it can do. The only reason I play bass is so I can be in a band. That was my entry fee to joining the band: 'I've got to learn to play this? Okay, I'll do my best.'"

> **"MOST PEOPLE START BANDS BY JAMMING. BOB AND I INSTEAD STARTED TALKING ABOUT WHAT A BAND SHOULD BE."**
>
> ALEX KAPRANOS

Kapranos laughs at his friend's admission, continuing: "Bob's role in Franz Ferdinand is way more important than just playing bass. Anyone can play bass – Bob is proof of that! The ideas to make the band great: that's something only Bob could have done. So many musicians get caught up in stupid shit, like how loud they are in the mix or how fast they can play a keyboard. Bob and I don't care who's playing what, so long as it sounds good in the end."

That it's taken so long for *The Human Fear* to arrive is down to a combination of the pandemic, getting the band's line-up resolved and promoting 2022's singles compilation, *Hits To The Head*. Focusing on their singles proved invaluable, as Hardy reveals: "Playing a hits set boiled down what the essence of Franz Ferdinand is for us. Looking back at our body of work made me quite emotional. We'd been writing songs before the compilation, but they didn't quite sound like Franz Ferdinand. Going back to the new material, it was: 'What was it about those past singles that we loved?' and playing them had made me realise: 'These are all really *fun*.'"

The tour saw Kapranos appreciate the similarities between his own band and his heroes, as he considers: "The holy grail for a band is to retain your identity. If you listen to three seconds of a song, you know it's them: the Ramones, The Clash, The Kinks. But then you want to do something new, too. I was trying to push these songs in new directions, while always sounding like a Franz Ferdinand song.

"On this album, *Hooked* and especially *Black Eyelashes* don't sound like anything

© Fiona Torre

we've done but, when people hear it, I'd love to think they immediately know it's us."

The gonzo robodance of *Hooked* seems destined to be a live favourite, echoing Justice and electroclash in its frazzled riff. "I was trying to play the dumbest heavy metal riff I possibly could on a guitar, then put it through a synth," Kapranos discloses. "I love Black Sabbath and wanted some of that. But for three years, it was just a riff."

The band's producer, Mark Ralph, helped turn it into a proper song. Ralph had been the engineer on 2013's *Right Thoughts, Right Words, Right Action* album. He's since produced a battalion of huge names, including Years And Years, Becky Hill, Rag'n'Bone Man and Jess Glynne.

"Mark is a machine," raves Hardy. "Even talking to him on *Right Thoughts...*, Mark had worked on hundreds of records. It was no surprise he became a superstar producer soon after." Kapranos adds: "Some producers get caught up in the recording process and basically love smelling their own farts.

"Mark is instinctive, he can see the goal of what the album should be and he doesn't have an ego. Some big elements of this album came from the demos, and Mark wasn't afraid to leave those in there."

LOVE ILLUMINATION

Joining *Classic Pop* over Zoom from their hotel rooms in Monterrey before a show supporting The Killers, Kapranos and Hardy are still seemingly enthusiastic about touring. Before the band, Kapranos was a part-time college lecturer. He remembers: "There was a globe in the lecture room. I'd look at it and daydream: 'Imagine one day going to Tokyo! Or Los Angeles!' A year later, the band took off, and I've been so lucky to see those places for real. I never take this for granted."

The frontman now lives in Paris with his wife, French singer Clara Luciani. The couple married in May 2023, four months before their son was born. Asking if Luciani inspired *Hooked*'s ecstatic line: "I thought I knew what love was – and then I met you" causes the usually erudite singer to get flustered. He tries offering a blancmange of an answer that "There's a lot of love in all the songs," before confessing: "I'm not very good at talking about my personal life. It's easier to talk about in the context of lyrics, but very difficult in normal conversation. Songs communicate things that I can't in normal conversation, which is one reason I write songs in the first place."

That's fair enough, and Kapranos later reveals how becoming a father inspired *The Human Fear*'s explosive finale, *The Birds*. A fantastic extended cathartic holler, he says: "*The Birds* is about overcoming the fear of rejection from society. Having a young child, I'm particularly aware how children suffer from being outcast, thanks to social media. It's easy to become an outcast, and the song hopefully captures the relief and excitement of being anonymous back in the flock."

The almost languid *Cats*' inspiration was more prosaic, as he laughs: "I enjoyed imagining myself feeling like a cat. I wrote it just after my son was born, when there was no opportunity to prowl the city at night on my own. There's a certain degree of escapism there."

Sparking inspiration: The Mael brothers paired up with Franz Ferdinand for the supergroup FFS

© Munachi Osegbu

That the album achieves Franz Ferdinand's goal of always sounding like Franz Ferdinand is in part thanks to Alex Kapranos' vocals. His voice is ever more expressive, yet it's also instantly familiar. That wasn't always the case, as it took him several years to feel comfortable behind the mic.

"Working out what my voice was, it was a sudden moment," he recalls. "Throughout my twenties, I was afraid of singing, because I was afraid of being perceived as not cool. Then one night, I was out with Bob and my then-girlfriend, doing karaoke at a club in Glasgow."

Singing *Be-Bop-A-Lula*, Kapranos "totally let rip". He goes on: "It was the first time I'd let go as a singer. I thought: 'Oh! *That's* how you do it!' From that moment on, I realised I could enjoy it, rather than feeling self-conscious."

SURPRISE FACTOR

Franz Ferdinand worked with one of the great unselfconscious artists in 2015, when they teamed up with Sparks for a self-titled LP as FFS. "They still have an interest in what's going on around them," says Hardy. "We still share the occasional email and they'll get in touch when they're in Glasgow." Kapranos adds: "They showed music is a lifelong vocation and Sparks were inspiring in showing how to be completely driven by their work, so far into their career."

A second FFS record is unlikely, however, as Hardy notes: "FFS was about the surprise factor. Volume two wouldn't have the same impact or meaning." Instead, they'd love to make a record with The Cure or Queen. Or both. Hardy laughs: "I'd love to ask Brian May to do a solo for us, mainly just so I could hang out with Brian May."

The new album's first single, *Audacious*, "has definite influences of both Queen and The Cure," acknowledges Kapranos. "I read an interview with Robert Smith saying how much he hates Queen. So I'd love to do a song with both Robert Smith *and* Brian May."

Persuading Robert Smith to overcome his fear of Queen? That really would be an audacious move.

● *The Human Fear* is released by Domino on 10 January and reviewed on page 81. Franz Ferdinand play Shepherd's Bush Empire on 5-6 March 2025 and Glasgow Barrowland on 7 March.

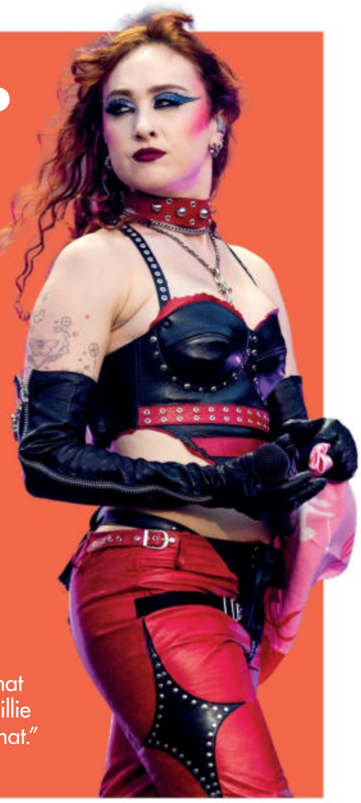
CHAPPELL WORSHIP

Franz Ferdinand are concerned about the current state of pop – but are quick to point out some honourable exceptions. Alex Kapranos ponders: "So much contemporary pop seems to be generic phrases about relationships, jumbled up together to fit the rhythm of the melody. I don't feel like the singer is communicating anything about their life to me."

He believes Chappell Roan, whose album *The Rise And Fall Of A Midwest Princess* recently reached No.1, makes pop with substance: "Chappell is perfect pop, because it feels like I'm listening to *her*. I feel I'm getting a deep, brutal insight into what's going on with her life, while it's still set to a beautifully catchy melody."

Kapranos also believes it's a good time for bands, citing Sprints and English Teacher as great new talent. He says of the latter: "They're exceptional musicians, yet none of them are showing off. That's my favourite kind of band."

Meanwhile, Bob Hardy is a big fan of Billie Eilish, stating: "Billie has such an emotive voice. *What Was I Made For?,* the song she did for *Barbie*, is something that I listen to once or twice a week. It blows my mind how Billie took Barbie as a concept and honed it into a song like that."



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JENNIFER RUSH
WITH LEE WILLIAMS

"I've been a huge fan of Jennifer's since *The Power Of Love* and have a great collection of singles and albums that she's released throughout the last 40 years. Long forgotten about here in the UK, I've followed Jennifer's career in Europe where she is still popular. Here's the first time I met her, in Berlin back in December 2004. She was so lovely and genuinely touched I'd travelled from the UK to see her perform. It's one of those moments that will live with me forever."

CLARK DATCHLER
WITH SCOTT DREW AND DIANE NORMAN

"We are pictured here with Clark Datchler the day after seeing Johnny Hates Jazz play in Poole on 5 October. We had a lovely chat with him as we were staying in the same hotel, a very genuine and good natured gentleman. The concert was great, smaller venues make it much more intimate. The band played all the hits and really seemed to be enjoying themselves, which was good to see as the tour was coming to an end. We're planning to see them again at the Indigo at the O2 on 19 December, too, for their Christmas special."

CLAIRE RICHARDS
WITH ADRIAN KEEBLE

"I had the pleasure of meeting Claire Richards from Steps twice in October on the Everybody Dance Live tour at the Kings Theatre in Portsmouth, shown here on 16 October, and then at the Bournemouth Pavilion on 28 October. She's so warm and friendly. A real pop star. What an amazing show, too. Spectacular choreography and banging tunes – a perfect night out."

Paul Young
Take A P
Me Wit
VIP LAN

PAUL YOUNG
WITH PAUL AND ELSPETH DAVIES

"This photo with Paul was taken during his 'chatting' tour on 18 October 2023 at Thornden Hall near Southampton. We are both fans but my wife Elspeth, in particular, has a real soft spot for him, and this pic made her day. You can see by the look on her face how happy she is to meet Paul."

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FRAZIER CHORUS SUE

“WE’RE NOT HERE TO BE SOME CULTISH BAND THAT YOU COULD OVERLOOK,” FRAZIER CHORUS’ FRONTMAN TIM FREEMAN ONCE SAID, BUT THAT’S EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM. ALL THE SAME, 1989’S *SUE* IS OVERDUE WIDER RECOGNITION FOR ITS SOFTLY SPOKEN BUT CAUSTIC SYNTH-POP.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

There are many reasons to remember Frazier Chorus better. There’s their debut single for 4AD, 1987’s *Sloppy Heart*, a Phil Spector-esque sniff of romance on a train, while *Dream Kitchen*’s an intimate tale of frustrated possibilities offering the first whispers of the singular *Sue*. Then there’s their breathtaking, inimitable but unlikely *Anarchy In The UK* cover, a re-recorded *Sloppy Heart* B-side. That’s not to mention that, alongside Dutch footballer Wim van Hanegem and actor Telly Savalas, they’re preserved for posterity by Half Man Half Biscuit on 1991’s *Girlfriend’s Finished With Him*: “How can you say we sound like Frazier Chorus?”

It’s a decent legacy, even more when one knows they won *Saturday Superstore*’s video vote. But unless you’re a loyal fan like Belle And Sebastian’s Stuart Murdoch, this isn’t what most people talk about. They *could* be discussing frontman Tim Freeman’s gently murmured vocals and observational, scathing lyrics – “Your life’s too good to be true,” *Dream Kitchen* runs, “I think I’ll ruin it for you” – or Frazier Chorus’ unorthodox embrace of woodwind, strings and brass alongside synths and drum machines. Instead, they point to Freeman’s role as the inspiration for *The Office*’s Tim Canterbury, who was played by his brother, Martin.

Freeman might only have himself to blame for the fact Frazier Chorus’ sophisticated, literate pop isn’t – and rarely was – on people’s radar. With *Dream Kitchen* B-listed on Radio 1 a few months before *Sue*’s 1989 release, he appeared on Music Box’s *Rockin’ In The UK* and couldn’t have sounded less thrilled. “You can’t get passionate about us because the subject matter isn’t passionate,” he warned. “If I’m talking about cups of coffee or carpets and things, [they are] hardly the most emotional, passionate subjects.”

A graphic artist, Freeman had formed his seemingly unambitious group in Brighton with his girlfriend Kate Holmes. Then studying at the University of Sussex, she’d spent teenage years as a pony-loving Thomas Hardy fan, yet she’d also played flute on recordings by legendary dub producer Mad Professor, who’d seen her in a university reggae band. But if she and Freeman bonded over New Order and Cocteau Twins, The Durutti Column forced their hand.

“I just found it extraordinary,” Freeman told Music Box, “that they could use those kind of instruments, which nowadays don’t seem so bizarre, like having a cor anglais and trumpet and clarinet and weird synthy noises, pretty heavy on percussion. We thought, ‘Well, they can do that, and it still sounds like pop. It doesn’t sound like avant-garde nonsense.’ So it’s true that the next day we got it together and had a little practise, found a little clarinettist and a percussionist, and just *went there*.”

With Freeman in charge and Holmes on flute, Chris Taplin was the clarinettist, who also undertook programming, while the percussionist was Michéle Allardyce. “We played Sunday lunchtimes for a couple of years in obscurity,” she recalled for a blog, Cloudberry Cake, in 2015. “We weren’t part of the Brighton scene.”

Eventually, however, Freeman and Holmes travelled to London, walking from label to label to drop off their demos, including a *Sloppy Heart* prototype. With Plop!, their then name, doing little to help, they made new attempts as Frazier Chorus. This time 4AD’s Ivo Watts-Russell picked up the phone, but the number they’d given had been disconnected.

> “WE WERE PROBABLY BEFORE OUR TIME. MY ONE REGRET IS WE SHOULD HAVE STAYED WITH 4AD AND NOT GONE FOR THE POUND SIGNS.”
>
> KATE HOLMES

“Apparently he tried to call me about 40 times,” Holmes told David Eastaugh on Future Radio’s *C86 Show* in 2020. But his persistence paid off, and for Freeman and Holmes, a record deal was a dream come true. Soon they were recording *Sloppy Heart* with producer Gil Norton, fresh from labelmates Throwing Muses’ self-titled debut album. Nonetheless, according to Taplin, who spoke with *Music Technology* in 1989, “We had always known that we were only with them temporarily. They were signing up a lot of aggressive guitar bands like A.R. Kane and the Pixies, and we felt that our music was slightly more mainstream than typical 4AD material. Almost as soon as *Sloppy Heart* came out, we received a phone call from Virgin Records.”

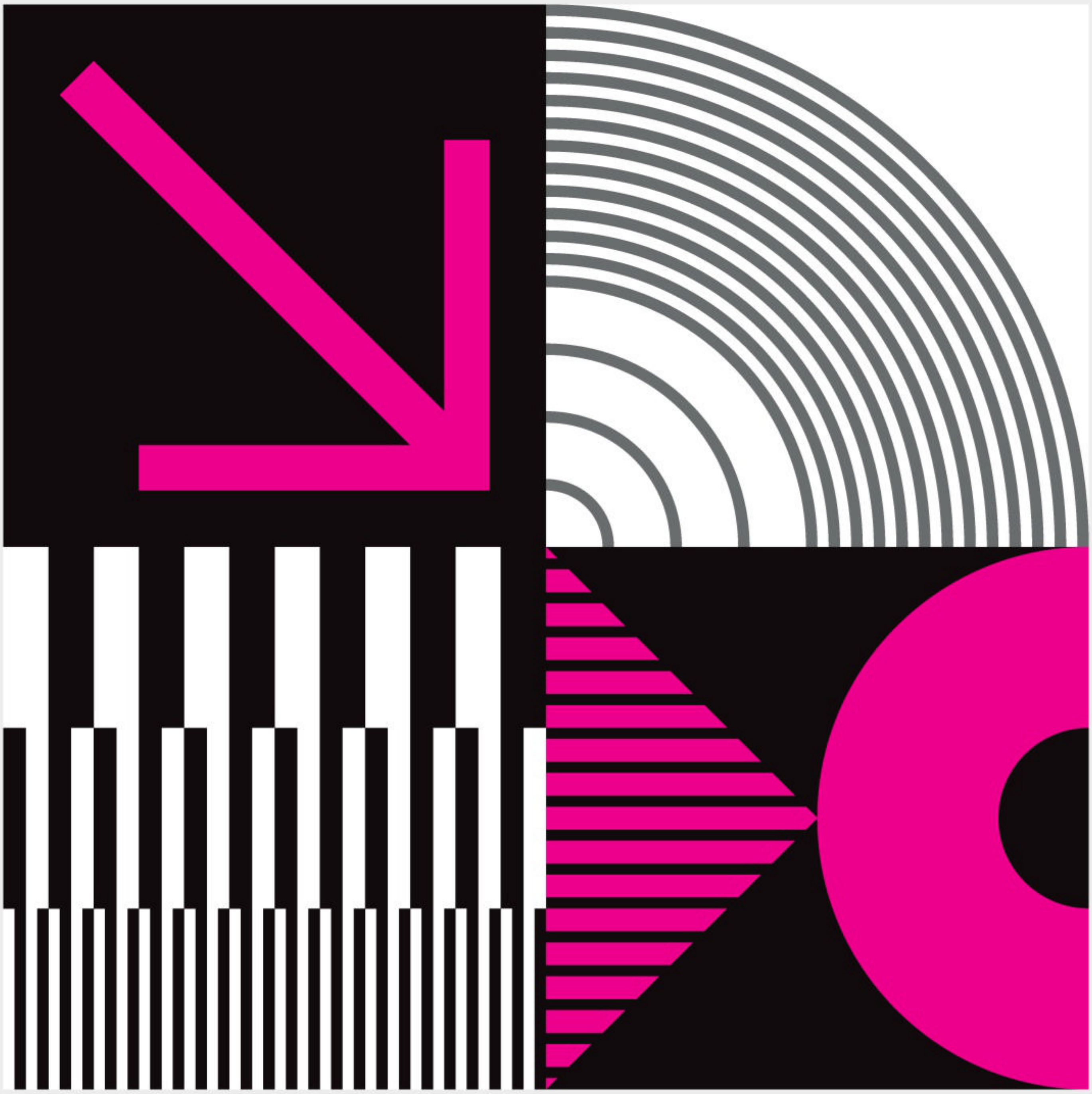
Richard Branson’s label had an offer that Frazier Chorus couldn’t refuse. “Virgin then signed us for quite a lot of money,” Holmes told Eastaugh, “and we got a wage and everything.”

This time they entered the studio with producer Hugh Jones, who’d just finished Voice Of The Beehive’s *Let It Bee*. “It cost a lot of fucking money!” Watts-Russell told blog Arcane Delights of *Sue*. But, Holmes conceded: “It probably was a little bit overproduced,” adding, “he was an amazing producer but he actually probably gave me a nervous breakdown.”

Things proceeded better until *Dream Kitchen* arrived on radio. “They really should have pulled out all the stops,” Holmes elaborated. “They did absolutely nothing.” The single stalled at No.57, and though follow-up *Typical!* did slightly better, their charms were largely ignored. “At its best,” *NME* decreed, “*Sue* is great pop”, but it peaked outside the Top 40. “We were like early Pulp,” Holmes told Eastaugh. “We were probably before our time. We probably would have been much bigger if we’d come later… My one regret is we should probably have stayed with 4AD and not gone for the pound signs.”

After she and Freeman split during its making, 1991’s *Ray* sold worse and Frazier Chorus were dropped, then Holmes and Taplin fired Freeman from his own band. He ultimately kept the name for 1995’s *Wide Awake* LP, but then disappeared, his only prominent appearance since being with his brother Martin on the BBC’s *Who Do You Think You Are?*. Meanwhile, Kate Holmes married Creation Records’ Alan McGee and, after pairing up with Dubstar’s Sarah Blackwood as Client, finally enjoyed a UK Top 40 hit when 2005’s *Pornography* peaked at No.22.

Maybe this is how Freeman always wanted it. He was, after all, according to Virgin’s press release for *Ray*, “a songwriter who draws exclusively on his experience of ‘staying indoors all the time and getting away with as little as possible.’” So perhaps one can still find him happily “talking about cups of coffee or carpets”, albeit to a smaller audience. “I think people will either like us or ignore us,” he’d told Music Box, “and that really is fine by me.” *Sue*, nonetheless, begs to differ. ■

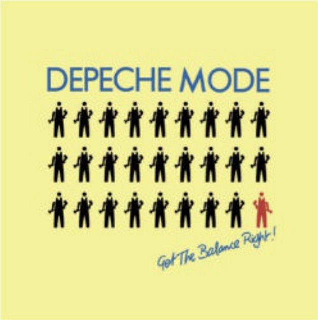


TOP 20
STANDALONE SINGLES OF THE 80s

Singles have traditionally been used to preview and promote new studio albums but, as our latest countdown reveals, many hit records in the 80s were self-contained pieces of art

BARRY PAGE

The standalone single wasn't a phenomenon birthed in the 80s, it was pioneered in the 60s by the likes of The Beatles and The Kinks, whose writing and recording prolificacy was matched by their paymasters' insatiable appetite for new product. In the punk era and beyond, many acts duly followed in their stead, offering fans material exclusive to the single, a practice that in a notoriously fickle marketplace was often necessary to keep them in the public eye in between their album releases. Our countdown includes singles that weren't included on the vinyl versions of the period-relevant studio LPs. We have also discounted tracks written to order for soundtracks, and singles used to promote hits compilations.


DEPECHE MODE
Get The Balance Right!

20

DEPECHE MODE

GET THE BALANCE RIGHT! (1983)

It may not appear in critics' lists of Depeche Mode's greatest tracks, but this transitional hit certainly marked a year zero moment following the recruitment of Alan Wilder. Previously restricted to touring and miming duties, the classically trained boffin finally had a chance to cut loose in the studio, working his magic on Martin Gore's latest world-weary composition. "I think it's a lot harder, more powerful and more direct," Gore told *Record Mirror*, "topics that everyone can relate to".

WONDERLAND
BIG COUNTRY

19

BIG COUNTRY

WONDERLAND (1984)

Announced by Bruce Watson's chiming guitar and a thunderous drum roll from Mark Brzezicki, this standalone single stemmed from a request from Big Country's label to cut a new track before they jetted off to the US on tour. Though not used to recording to such tight time constraints, the Scottish band somehow managed to conjure up a piece of magic, using the refrain from one of Watson's demos as a starting point. Continuing their impressive run of UK Top 20 hits, the future fan favourite peaked at No.8.

Tears For Fears
the way you are

18

TEARS FOR FEARS

THE WAY YOU ARE (1983)

Arguably the most divisive item in the Tears For Fears back catalogue, this underrated gem found the primal screamers in a state of artistic flux following the success of debut album *The Hurting* and its singles. Traversing Japan-esque art-rock terrain, *The Way You Are* became a minor hit and bought the duo valuable time before their next album release, but it's since been disowned by its makers. "We went down the rabbit hole of the intricate and clever production, but forgot about the song," rued Curt Smith to *Vulture* in 2022.

HOWARD JONES
LIKE TO GET TO KNOW YOU WELL
IK ZOU JE GRAAG WAT BETER LEREN KENNEN
ME GUSTARIA CONOCERTE BIEN
ICH MÖCHTE EUCH BESSER KENNENLERNEN
おまえをりつくしたい 知
SAREBBE BELLO CONOSCERVI BENE
ΘΑΘΕΛΑ ΝΑ ΕΙΜΑΙ ΠΙΟ ΚΟΝΤΑ ΣΟΜ
J'AIMERAIS MIEUX VOUS CONNAITRE
SKULLE VILIA LÄRA KÄNNA ER BÄTTRE

17

HOWARD JONES

LIKE TO GET TO KNOW YOU WELL (1984)

With four UK Top 20 hits already under his belt, eternal optimist Howard Jones kept up the chart momentum with this memorable single, recorded during a gap in his hefty touring schedule in 1984. Released to coincide with the Summer Olympics, this reggae-tinged paean to global citizenship found Jones ruminating on the original spirit of the Games, and how such a huge multicultural event could be used to break down barriers. Rising up the UK charts, it spent three weeks at No.4.

THUNDER IN THE MOUNTAINS
Toyah

16

TOYAH

THUNDER IN THE MOUNTAINS (1981)

In a year that saw 12 million tune in to BBC2 to watch them play at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, Toyah kept up their impressive chart run with this spirited hit, written in a summer that saw a heatwave suddenly give rise to violent thunderstorms. Recorded during Toyah Willcox's Boadicea phase, *Thunder In The Mountains* found the flame-haired singer ruminating on the inner-city violence and simmering tensions of the period, although its calls for rebellion were straight out of the punk rulebook.

the Cure
the Lovecats

15

THE CURE

THE LOVE CATS (1983)

Reinvented as a synth-pop duo following Simon Gallup's exit, The Cure found themselves in the upper reaches of the charts with what Robert Smith would later dub "stupid pop songs". An antidote to the doom-mongery of the *Pornography* album, the diversion alienated the fanbase, but the goth rockers picked up plenty of new admirers, and this feline favourite hit the Top 10. The jollity would be short-lived. "This is the last 'fun' single that we'll make," Smith told *No. 1*. "From now on we'll be heading back into the abyss."

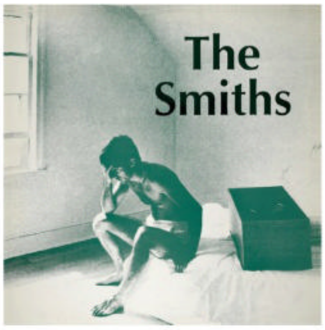
SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES
DEAR PRUDENCE

14

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES

DEAR PRUDENCE (1983)

Fans of The Beatles' 'White Album', the Banshees had previously recorded a version of heavy metal prototype *Helter Skelter*, before turning their attention to a song John Lennon had penned during the Fab Four's spiritual sojourn to India in 1968. The first single to feature moonlighting Cure guitarist Robert Smith, the band's goth-pop treatment of *Dear Prudence* arguably outclassed the original and became their biggest hit since 1977 debut *Hong Kong Garden*.



13

THE SMITHS

WILLIAM, IT WAS REALLY NOTHING (1984)

Incredibly, the music for this ephemeral hit and its classic B-sides – *Please, Please, Please Let Me Get What I Want* and *How Soon Is Now?* – were all written by Johnny Marr during a productive four days at his Earls Court flat in June 1984. Speculation was rife that the protagonist was Associate Billy Mackenzie, but what's certain is it marked an attempt to craft a single redolent of the band's musical heroes. "The two-minute-10-second single was power," Morrissey told *Rolling Stone*.

A DIFFERENT CORNER
GEORGE MICHAEL

12

GEORGE MICHAEL
A DIFFERENT CORNER (1986)

Released mere weeks after George Michael had announced his intentions to leave the Trojan Horse that was Wham!, this ballad found him at his most vulnerable. His sexuality still a thinly veiled secret, the heartfelt No.1 was penned in the aftermath of a brief relationship, the tension heightened by its threadbare arrangement. As if to emphasise the singer's feelings of emotional imprisonment, the video was devoid of colour, its illusory celestial setting more akin to a mental health facility.

WHAM!
I'm your man

11

WHAM!
I'M YOUR MAN (1985)

Wham! spent much of 1985 touring the world, including a historic visit to China. New song *The Edge Of Heaven* was premiered during the US leg, but it was a track George Michael had written on an internal flight that would become their penultimate single and third UK chart-topper. According to George, *I'm Your Man* took its inspiration from "wildly good sex", and its racy lyrics were evidence of a new, adult-focused direction. It was the final song played at their farewell concert at Wembley in June 1986.

Soft Cell
Torch

10

SOFT CELL
TORCH (1982)

An impassioned tale of obsession and unrequited love, this non-LP cut was inspired by a trip to New York in which Marc Almond had been moved to tears by a bar-room singer. With John Gatchell's flugelhorn authenticating its smoky jazz club ambience, and guest vocalist Cindy Ecstasy stepping up to the plate in the torch singer role, impressed record buyers sent it to No.2, although Dave Ball later alleged chart compilers Gallup had miscounted, and that *Torch* had outsold Adam Ant's No.1 *Goody Two Shoes* by three-to-one.

WE ARE GLASS
GARY NUMAN

09

GARY NUMAN
WE ARE GLASS (1980)

It takes a brave artist to preview a new studio LP – *Telekon* – with two non-album singles, but Gary Numan was at his peak, and for Numanoids the purchases of *We Are Glass* and *I Die: You Die* represented great value. Both 45s consolidated his successes, but as evidenced by the former's lyrics, cracks were beginning to appear. "I'd written the song about how I felt in the wake of my success," Gary wrote in his autobiography. "Fragmented, transparent, hard, brittle, cold, sharp and just about ready to break apart."

08

PET SHOP BOYS
ALWAYS ON MY MIND (1987)

Commissioned to perform an Elvis Presley track of their choosing on an ITV show marking 10 years since the King's death, the Pets gave this country classic a hi-NRG makeover. Although the *Actually* album campaign was in full swing, the duo bowed to pressure to release it, issuing it in between the singles *Rent* and *Heart*, and were rewarded with a Christmas No.1. The sleeve amusingly stated, "not from the album, actually", but a vastly different nine-minute version did appear on *Introspective*.

THE·JAM
GOING UNDERGROUND

07

THE JAM
GOING UNDERGROUND/ THE DREAMS OF CHILDREN (1980)

Never ones to short-change fans, half of The Jam's 18 UK singles were standalones, including this double-header gem. Built around Paul Weller's fondness for 60s psychedelia, *The Dreams Of Children* was the intended A-side, until a factory cock-up meant the radio-friendly *Going Underground* got top billing. Written in the early throes of Margaret Thatcher's term, it chimed with the disaffected youth, going straight to UK No.1, the first to do so since Slade's heyday.

THE STONE ROSES
FOOLS GOLD 4.15

06

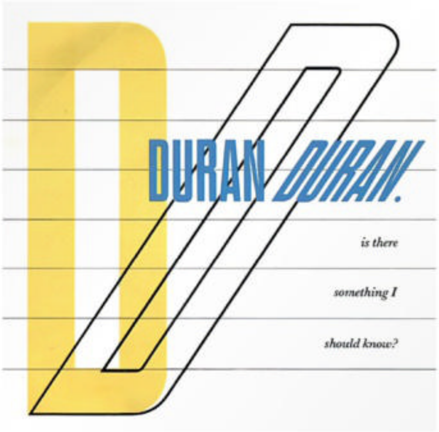
THE STONE ROSES
FOOLS GOLD/WHAT THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR (1989)

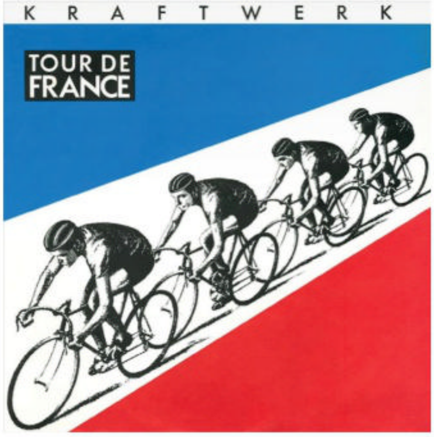
Released in a good year for the Roses, this double A appeared in the slipstream of their debut album, and gave them their breakthrough after a series of under-performing 45s. Boasting a title befitting of their hubris, *What The World Is Waiting For* was formulaic jangly fare, but most ears were tuned to *Fools Gold*, whose mesmerising drum loop had been sourced from an LP of breakbeats. Conceived as an experimental B-side, it's earned a place at baggy's top table.

05

THE HUMAN LEAGUE
MIRROR MAN (1982)

How do you follow a series of smash hits and a multi-platinum album? In the case of Sheffield's finest, the answer was to keep calm and carry on touring. A re-release of *Being Boiled* kept them in the mix, as did remix LP *Love And Dancing*, which had been painstakingly fashioned from *Dare*'s multi-tracks. Left off difficult fourth album *Hysteria* but included on US EP *Fascination!*, *Mirror Man* found the band in Motown territory, with the girls' "oohs" and "ahhs" authenticating the retro-pop sound.





LOVE WILL TEAR US APART
A FACTORY RECORD—FAC 23

04

DURAN DURAN
IS THERE SOMETHING I SHOULD KNOW? (1983)

Capitalising on the Duranmania that was now sweeping the globe, the band at the forefront of the Second British Invasion went straight to No.1 with this smash. "It was a fantastic result," wrote John Taylor in his memoir, "although our level of cocksureness was so high, it didn't come as a complete surprise." Built on an irresistible guitar riff from Andy Taylor, this arrived in between the *Rio* and *Seven And The Ragged Tiger* albums, but in the US was included on a reshaped version of Duran's eponymous debut.

03

KRAFTWERK
TOUR DE FRANCE (1983)

By the early 80s the musical world had caught up with Kraftwerk, and the original electronic trailblazers were now sharing chart space with the people they'd influenced. But although they would fail to capitalise on the success of *The Model* and spend much of the decade obsessing over new tech, there would be one further classic from the enigmatic Germans. Evolving from sessions for the aborted *Techno Pop* LP, *Tour De France* manifested their cycling obsession with samples of bicycle chains and Herr Hütter's heavy breathing.

02

JOY DIVISION
LOVE WILL TEAR US APART (1980)

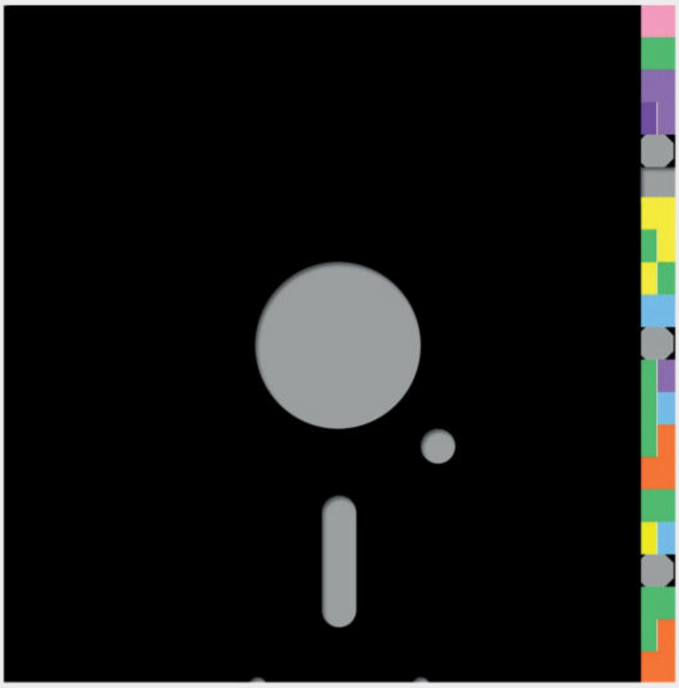
An eerily prophetic and devastating insight into Ian Curtis' fragile emotional state, *Love Will Tear Us Apart* was developed in the drab environs of Joy Division's Manchester rehearsal space and debuted on tour in October 1979. Scheduled as a non-LP single and forerunner to second album *Closer*, the band's signature song originally employed a faster tempo – heard on the punkier Peel session mix and the Pennine version – until Factory Records' Tony Wilson persuaded Curtis to adopt more of a Sinatra-like croon. Issued posthumously, it peaked at No.13.

01

NEW ORDER
BLUE MONDAY (1983)

Originally conceived as a keyboard-based track in which New Order would be spared the apparent indignity of encoring by pressing down a special key that played a little melody in their absence, *Blue Monday* would morph into what Stephen Morris would later describe as a Frankenstein's monster of a song, and one whose clever distillation of influences as disparate as Ennio Morricone, Kraftwerk and Giorgio Moroder would not only make them the envy of their synth-pop contemporaries, but also prick the ears of a certain Stock Aitken Waterman. But true to Factory Records' unconventional methods and the band's own sheer bloody-mindedness, its path to musical greatness was littered with obstacles.

This was, of course, a band whose lyrics didn't appear in their song titles, and who wouldn't start lifting singles from albums until 1985's *Low-Life*. In the case of *Blue Monday* – which at the time only appeared on the US cassette version of *Power, Corruption And Lies* – the band refused to edit it down from its seven-minute playing time for radio, and wouldn't mime on *Top Of The Pops*. But *Blue Monday*'s quality and popularity in the clubs would endure, and the record unwittingly became the biggest-selling 12" of all time. And, for two happy weeks in 1983, it even appeared in the same Top 40 rundown as *Love Will Tear Us Apart*.



BLUE MONDAY WOULD MORPH INTO WHAT STEPHEN MORRIS DESCRIBED AS A FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

STILL CLIMBING

MORE THAN 20 YEARS SINCE THE SUCCESS OF *WHITE LADDER*, DAVID GRAY HAS RECAPTURED ITS COMBINATION OF HEARTACHE AND HOPE ON NEW ALBUM *DEAR LIFE*. "SONGS SPRANG FROM NOWHERE," HE SAYS...

JORDAN BASSETT

David Gray once – quite literally – captured the sound of the city. His breakthrough album, *White Ladder*, was recorded in his bedroom in north-east London with such a DIY set-up that its biggest single, *Babylon*, features the sound of a car driving by outside. Some 26 years later, Gray is still inspired by the chaos of urbanity. Shortly before our interview, for instance, feeling rundown, he was caught in a torrential downpour while on London's Marylebone Road, when an unexpected sight immediately lifted his mood.

"This Deliveroo driver came past on a bike, with his hands off the handlebars and he was singing his head off," Gray laughs over video call. "In the pissing rain! You don't really get that anywhere else. You get this mad stuff: these weird confluences of energy. I love the theatricality of the city. It's endlessly replenishing; it's never the same twice. But it is a demanding environment. It takes a lot from you to be there."

DEAR LIFE
DAVID GRAY

So, for his meticulously crafted 13th album, the electronica-infused *Dear Life*, Gray decamped to his makeshift studio in rural Norfolk, where he relished the chance to escape the noise of the capital. He's "a different person" in the countryside, Gray says: "I know I'm in a place where magic happens. I dial into the landscape, the speaking landscape: the geese, the sounds of the birds, the marshes, the beach, the sound of the sea in the distance. Those elements encourage a poeticism that's different."

That poeticism runs deep through *Dear Life*, which ebbs with the kind of mature, understated music Gray's perfected ever since he went against the grain of Britpop's maximalism in the early 1990s. Alongside producer Ben de Vries, with whom he worked on his previous two records, Gray decorates minimalist beats with ghostly instrumentation that underlines its wistful themes. He tentatively excavates relationships that have shifted into the past tense (*After The Harvest*), grief (the gorgeous *Eyes Made Rain*) and even the beauty of nature itself (*Sunlight On Water*).

"I DIAL INTO THE LANDSCAPE: THE GEESE, THE SOUNDS OF THE BIRDS, THE MARSHES, THE BEACH, THE SOUND OF THE SEA"

LIGHTER GRAY

For all the melancholia, though, there is plenty of lightness, too. The vivid *Plus & Minus*, featuring Essex singer-songwriter Talia Rae, is his most commercial-sounding single in years, while *Fighting Talk* sees him poke fun at his own earnestness: "Damn the lyric running round my head all afternoon/ Damn the swooning, sentimental tunesmith who wrote it."

This lightness is evident throughout our hour-long interview: Gray is motormouthed, entertaining company, as fabulously profane as he is enthusiastic. Give him a topic and he'll riff on it with Labrador-like energy. When we compliment the electronic elements on *Dear Life*, he explains excitedly that his nephew introduced him to a tiny drum machine called a Pocket Operator, which he approached with childlike wonder.

"It's like a wafer," he says, wide-eyed, before making a culinary suggestion that would make us think twice about having dinner round David Gray's house: "You could probably spread a bit of pâté on there and have an electronic canapé! They've just got the crunchiest sounds and this very intuitive thing. You can really mangle the sounds – distort, delay, squish, filter. It's really..."

Unable to express his feelings in words, he lets out an awe-inspired sigh.

His last few albums have been focused on analogue sounds, the exception being 2019's *Gold In A Brass Age*, on which he placed the digital aspects front

Elemental sounds: David Gray decamped to rural Norfolk to record his 13th studio album, *Dear Life*

© Robin Grierson

WIN!

EXCLUSIVE SIGNED COPIES OF *DEAR LIFE*

Classic Pop is offering its readers a chance to win one of three signed copies of David Gray's brand new studio album, *Dear Life*, which is due for release on 17 January.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO ENTER

“A DRUM MACHINE AND AN ACOUSTIC GUITAR, WHEN YOU GET IT RIGHT, IS AN AMAZING COMBINATION – WORKING IN A DIY WAY, I STILL PREFER THAT”

© Robin Grierson

David Gray has scored six UK Top 10 albums and four Top 20 singles

and centre. Here, the interplay is more subtle, as he blends live acoustic performances over “a rigid spine of order” provided by the songs’ electronic beats.

“A drum machine and an acoustic guitar,” he says, “when you get it right, is an amazing combination – that simplicity. If you can get the lyric to do what you need, if you can get the vocal to carry what it needs to, it’s very powerful. Working in a DIY way, as a bedroom artist, I still prefer that.”

Gray could be talking about the sparsely recorded *White Ladder*, which is perhaps no coincidence. He began work on *Dear Life* pre-pandemic, with production postponed by his Covid-delayed tour to mark the album’s 20th anniversary. Was his re-exploration of those songs an influence on *Dear Life*?

“It definitely was, though I couldn’t say to what extent, or how profoundly,” he says. When he recorded *White Ladder* with producers Iestyn Polson and Craig McClune, he adds, “the simplicity of what we did was remarkable. We didn’t have anything! All we had was a Roland Groovebox [production unit] and a bloody keyboard, a couple of guitars, a really dodgy vocal mic, a sampler and a computer.”

The result upended his fortunes. Gray had been dropped by EMI Records after *White Ladder*’s predecessor, *Sell, Sell, Sell*, his third album, didn’t exactly live up to its title. He released *White Ladder* via his own IHT Records; the album went on to shift seven million copies, edging to UK No.1 over two-and-a-half years thanks to word of mouth. Gray has leveraged this success to follow his own muse, a journey that has often taken him towards bruised balladry rather than karaoke anthems in the making.

© Robin Grierson

The UK leg of Gray’s 2025 tour begins on 13 March in Portsmouth and ends at the Royal Albert Hall on 3 April

“CHURNING EMOTION”

His last album, 2021’s acclaimed *Skellig*, stripped his already spartan formula down to its barest elements and was inspired by an Irish island once inhabited by medieval monks. If *Dear Life* represents a return to the commerciality of *White Ladder*, it has been hard-won. In a statement accompanying the record, he explained: “The previous few years had seen a fair amount of tumult and upheaval in my life, and there have been some tough goodbyes.” Asked to expand, he is briefly – for the only time throughout our conversation – lost for words.

“Well...” he starts softly, “hard to say. I don’t really want to expand on what are very personal things – the main reason being that they’re unresolved.” As if he’s analysing a pop song, Gray adds: “Some of the relationships that I’m talking about there haven’t returned to a state of resolution. They are still all over the place, so I don’t wanna upset somebody by saying something. I’ve had some very profound relationships in my musical career and some of those relationships ended over this last period of time.

“It threw everything up into the air and there was a long process of extrication, which was heartbreakingly difficult and incredibly stressful at times. And then there’s stuff in my personal life. Shit happens, especially when you get older and you’re sort of in ‘Sniper’s Alley’. Things happen that do pull the floor out from underneath everything. I think these births, death and goodbyes, they shake you up. They shake you back into more of a state of openness and humility, hopefully.”

NO CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

In 2000, as his gradual success reached boiling point, David Gray was drafted in to replace Burt Bacharach on Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage. His single *Babylon*, which had been re-released to capitalise on the surprise success of *White Ladder*, had just reached No.5 on the UK chart.

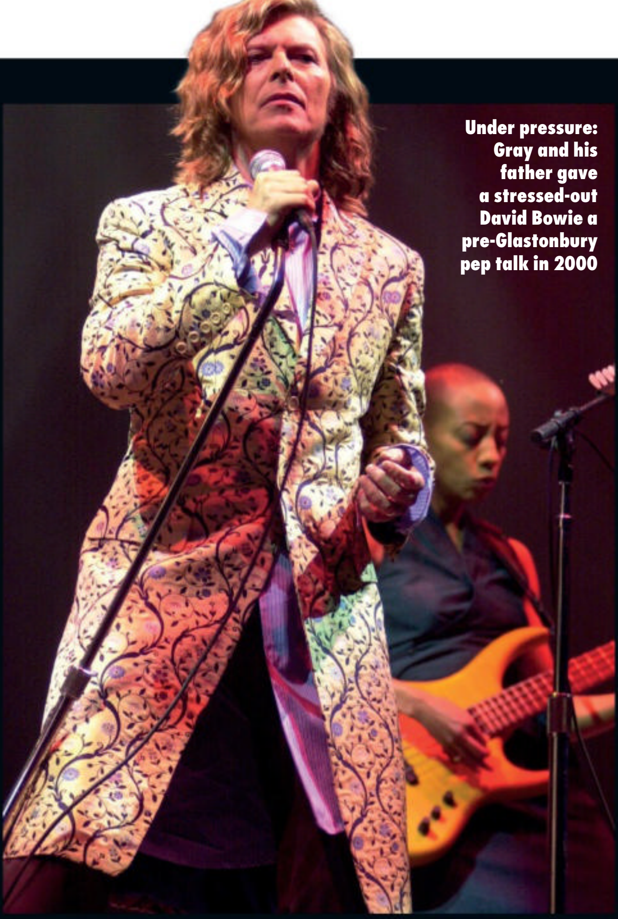
After the triumphant gig, he and his late father, Peter, were raiding the backstage bar when things got even better: they spotted David Bowie, who went on to headline the festival with a legendary performance.

Gray's father had sadly been diagnosed with cancer and so "he just didn't give a bollocks," the singer recalls. "My Dad said, 'Look at us having the time of our lives here and look at David Bowie standing outside his dressing room. He looks lost. You know what, son? I'm gonna go and talk to him.'" Gray protested but could only follow as his father approached the icon.

Indeed, Bowie *was* a having a wobble over what could be described as his 'comeback gig': "He was really over-thinking it."

Naturally, he invited them into his dressing room to offer advice on the setlist. "He opened with *Wild Is The Wind*. I said, 'Brilliant start!' And then it went: *Ashes To Ashes, Starman*. I said: 'I think this is gonna go well, David...'

Gray and his father had the "loveliest chat" with Bowie: "It wasn't like chatting to a superstar. He was so chill." Gray still marvels at the experience. "It was really down to my Dad because he basically just waded in there."



Under pressure: Gray and his father gave a stressed-out David Bowie a pre-Glastonbury pep talk in 2000

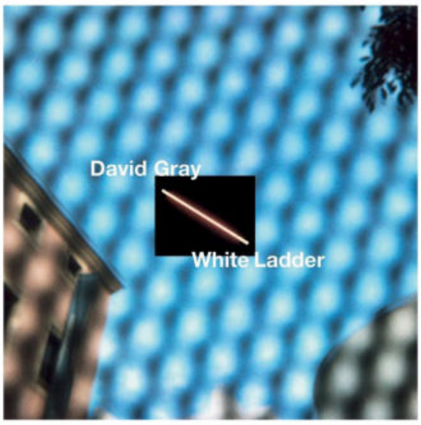
The resulting "churning emotion", he says, is rich with material: "I noticed that songs just sprang from nowhere, and I seem to be saying something that had been bottled up for a while." On *After the Harvest*, he sings of an "ache where the heart is" and confesses: "I feel all used up; I feel tarnished/ Like smudged eyeliner; chipped nail varnish."

YOUNGER VOICES

Gray's focus on endings might overwhelm *Dear Life*, were it not for the album's youthful playfulness. He tinkered about with *Plus & Minus* for two decades before Talia Rae helped him unlock its potential. His manager met the Gen-Z singer, who's around the same age as the track, when she performed at an industry dinner in New York ("nightmare gig," Gray quips). Impressed, the manager struck up a conversation and it emerged that she was currently "obsessed" with *White Ladder*.

"It was like a serendipitous thing," says Gray, who'd struggled to find a vocalist who could reach the song's low notes. "Working with her has been so sweet. She's right at the beginning of her... let's not call it a 'journey'. Her path through life! She's at the beginning. Her eyes are wide. It's great because she's taking it all in. Youthful enthusiasm."

Completing the trifecta of younger assistants – along with Rae and the nephew who introduced him to that wafer-like drum machine – Gray's teenage daughter Florence sings on tracks such as *Fighting Talk*. He clearly enjoyed recording with his own flesh and blood, though admits with a laugh: "Unfortunately, I'm not the easiest person to please. I'm not very good at lying for convenience sake. It was quite demanding." He was most impressed by Florence's ability to improve his harmonies. "That was amazing. She survived the process – as has our relationship!"



ELECTRIC DREAMS

Of course, there's always been levity in Gray's work – even the aching *White Ladder* concluded with a cheeky acoustic cover of Soft Cell's *Say Hello, Wave Goodbye*. He's a fan of electro and synth-pop in general: "When you listen to a lot of The Human League or Depeche Mode, they sound absolutely fucking amazing because there's nothing going on. You've just got a couple of synths churning and a little drum machine. There's so much space for the richness of the sound."

Gray coveted the 1981 Soft Cell album *Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret*, which featured *Say Hello, Wave Goodbye*, in his early teens. He saw the late singer-songwriter Bryan Glancy and Mark Burgess of The Chameleons perform an acoustic version of the track in the 90s and was so blown away that he borrowed the idea. Soft Cell's Marc Almond and David Ball were, in turn, impressed by his take: "I added another chord to the chorus, which they congratulated me on." In a gruff northern accent, with a jokily begrudging tone, he recalls them noting, "'You added a B minor! It sounds so much better!'"

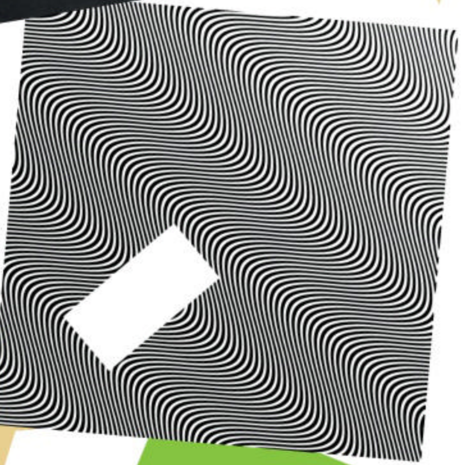
It's these "confluences of energy", as he said earlier, that made *White Ladder* such a success, and which define *Dear Life*, too. "My life's been more in balance," Gray says. "I've had more time to do things that I wanted to do. It's very easy to honour all your responsibilities, whether they're familial or work or whatever they are, but sometimes it's hard to build yourself into the mix. This is a common middle-aged problem. You kind of get squeezed out of your own life, and then..."

He trails off, before plucking brightness from the melancholia once more: "I've made a concerted effort to try to build some time in to do the things I like to do. To be in Norfolk, to breathe the air, to be outside, to take in this sustenance, this kind of energy. And that has led to a buoyant feeling. I'm very, very alive. I'm really, really enjoying what I do." ■

● *Dear Life* is out on 17 January 2025 via Laugh A Minute Records/ Secretly Distribution and reviewed on page 83

THE BEST OF 2024

theCURE
SONGS OF A LOST WORLD



CLASSIC POP'S PICK OF THE FINEST NEW ALBUMS, REISSUES, COMPILATIONS AND BOOKS FROM ACROSS THE PAST 12 MONTHS

JOHN EARLS AND STEVE HARNELL

NEW ALBUMS

THE CURE REIGN SUPREME PLUS STELLAR RETURNS FROM KYLIE, DEE C. LEE, PSB AND LL COOL J

01

THE CURE
SONGS OF A LOST WORLD
(POLYDOR/FICTION)

Worth the 16-year wait, The Cure's moving masterpiece could only have been made by a band of their age. It's the life experiences of older people. Yet, through defiant rock at its most intense, there was hope and love at its core. How cheering that everyone took them to their heart again.

02

JAMIE XX
IN WAVES
(YOUNG)

Jamie XX's debut, *In Colour*, revolutionised pop production. Having doubted himself in the nine years since, his return hasn't had the same impact. Yet, as an all-out pop record, album two is even more fun. A wild adventure, and rare in having all the collaborations come off.

03

CHARLI XCX
BRAT
(ATLANTIC)

Undoubtedly the year's most fashionable album, it was hilarious to see broadsheet papers become exercised at the notion of a brat summer, considering the record itself was a riotous tribute to rave. Charli had threatened to be a great pop star before. Finally, here was a record to match her attitude.

04

KYLIE
TENSION II
(BMG)

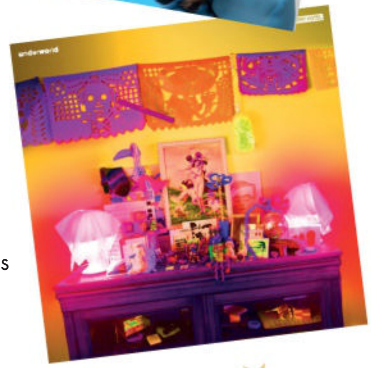
Where most artists would have bashed out some undercooked demos for a deluxe edition, Kylie instead hurtled back into her poppiest headspace. Nine new songs in 25 minutes was intense, while The Blessed Madonna collaboration *Edge Of Saturday Night* was a classic.

TENSION II
Kylie

DEE C LEE
JUST SOMETHING

05 DEE C. LEE
JUST SOMETHING
(ACID JAZZ)

Making The Cure look prolific, Dee eased back into the studio after 26 years and made the most of her second chance. Her voice was remarkably ageless, and she'd amassed the songs worthy of such an expressive, intimate way of connecting with your heart. There are some mighty grooves here, too.



06 UNDERWORLD
STRAWBERRY HOTEL
(SMITH HYDE PRODUCTIONS)

The ambient *Drift Series 1* made it appear that we were losing Underworld from the dancefloor. Instead, they marshalled themselves five years on to make their best all-out assault since *Second Toughest In The Infants*. There were moments of spartan beauty, but this was Underworld gloriously on the attack.

07 CROWDED HOUSE
GRAVITY STAIRS (BMG)

Late-night jazz, his father's wartime diaries, ELO, psychedelia... Neil Finn corralled many diverse influences into only Crowded House's eighth studio album. Mortality was the overarching theme, yet Finn and Nick Seymour's ability to sweeten any pill ensured it sounded heavenly throughout.

08 PET SHOP BOYS
NONETHELESS
(PARLOPHONE)

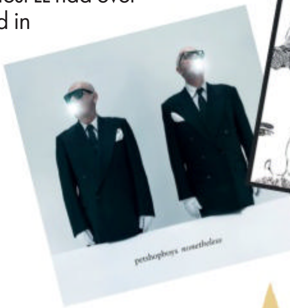
One of the most diverse PSB albums, Tennant/Lowe took on between-the-wars France, German schlager music as well as the return of Neil rapping, all while ushering strings back to the fore. That often means Serious Pets, but there was a whole lot of joy and an unusually personal mood here. And a ton of killer choruses, of course.

> ONE OF THE MOST DIVERSE PET SHOP BOYS ALBUMS, TENNANT/LOWE TOOK ON BETWEEN-THE-WARS-FRANCE, GERMAN SCHLAGER MUSIC AS WELL AS THE RETURN OF NEIL RAPPING

09 LL COOL J
THE FORCE
(DEF JAM)

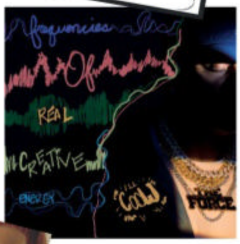
Long lost to acting and turning himself into a brand, LL Cool J suddenly remembered what he was good at. With Q-Tip producing, the beats were among the tightest LL had ever had to do battle with. It resulted in a taut, cohesive album with LL at his most pugilistic. A world away from his recent froth, this was *Mama Said Knock You Out* levels of confrontation.

CROWDED HOUSE
GRAVITY STAIRS



10 BOYS WONDER
QUESTION EVERYTHING
(SCARED HITLESS)

A time capsule of pre-Britpop whimsy, former (and now current again) Haircut One Hundred guitarist Graham Jones' next band made an album said to have predated Blur while remaining unreleased. Finally allowed out, those rumours had credence. It wasn't quite *Modern Life Is Rubbish*, but the excitable band were definitely onto something zeitgeist-y.



boys wonder
question everything

COMPILATIONS

NEW ROMANTICISM, NOW GEMS, YACHT ROCK AND BRYAN FERRY...

RUSTY EGAN PRESENTS
THE BLITZ CLUB

01 RUSTY EGAN PRESENTS BLITZED!
(DEMON)

A comprehensive overview of the music played on the dancefloor at the legendary New Romantic club by the Blitz's resident founding DJ. Staying true to the club's spirit, the tracklisting covers the big-hitters but still finds space for avant-garde experimentalism and the odd dash of deranged fun, too.

NOW
YEARBOOK
'87

02 NOW YEARBOOK '87
(NOW)

Capturing that key point in time before Madchester and acid house would break cover, this finds the UK charts in a fascinating state of flux as M/A/R/R/S anticipated the future and Duran Duran raged against the dimming of the new pop light with *Skin Trade*. Includes bangers aplenty as well as numerous forgotten gems.

KATIE PUCKRIK PRESENTS
A Yacht Rock Odyssey

03 KATIE PUCKRIK PRESENTS A YACHT ROCK ODYSSEY (EDSEL)

A wonderful sense of escapism permeates this 72-track compilation which sits alongside Puckrik's 2019 BBC series on the genre. An adventurous mix of familiar hits, deep cuts and romantic jams, there's space for genre anchors and obscurities. Throw on a light sweater, grab a cocktail and get ever so gently swept away.

NOW
YEARBOOK
'90

04 NOW YEARBOOK '90 (NOW)

Day-glo ravers and crystal-dangling pop stars rub shoulders on this superb overview of a stellar year for the UK charts. *Groove Is In The Heart*, *Being Boring* and Adamski's *Killer* jostle for attention alongside indie dance anthems such as Primal Scream's *Loaded* and Happy Mondays' melon twistin' *Step On*.

05 BRYAN FERRY: RETROSPECTIVE: SELECTED RECORDINGS 1973-2023 (BMG)

Covering half a century of the Roxy Music frontman's solo career, this 81-track overview encompasses a greatest hits disc, his extraordinary range of cover versions, as well as work with the Bryan Ferry Orchestra, which brilliantly reinterprets his songs as if they belong in the Jazz Age. A rarities discs rounds matters out.

REISSUES

BRONSKI BEAT'S POLITICAL POP, A LOST RAVE CLASSIC, PLUS BOXING CLEVER WITH ULTRAVOX, BOWIE AND OASIS

01
BRONSKI BEAT
THE AGE OF CONSENT
(LONDON)

Regrettably as relevant as ever, Bronski's perfect political pop also remains fearless and escapist. They didn't last, but this comprehensive reissue reminds us how lucky we were to have them at all. Demos hint at where they could have gone, while the new remixes here – including a Neil Tennant cameo – are superior to usual contemporary reworkings.

02
THE POLICE
SYNCRHONICITY
(UMR/POLYDOR)

Considering the sessions for The Police's final masterpiece were famously bitter, it's a miracle that Universal found anything spare in the vaults. Yet the trio's first deluxe edition adds many layers of fresh insight. An exemplary reissue worth the wait, hopefully there's more of this standard to follow.

03
ELECTRIBE 101
ELECTRIBAL MEMORIES
(DEMON)

Long out of print, one of rave's most mysterious and exciting albums got the love it deserves. There's been nothing quite like Electribe 101 in the years that have followed, the songs still tantalising and shiveringly gorgeous. Remixes from Larry Heard and Frankie Knuckles were comprehensively assembled, ensuring that a lost classic was revealed in all its glory.

04
PORTISHEAD
ROSELAND NYC LIVE
(UMC/ISLAND)

Beth Gibbons' solo album made new Portishead music seem more distant than ever. We should celebrate what there is, and turning 1998's live LP into a definitive document ensured that the power of their concerts hit home anew. Here's Portishead at their most graceful – a *Third* live album would be a perfect farewell.

05
ULTRAVOX
LAMENT (CHRYSALIS)

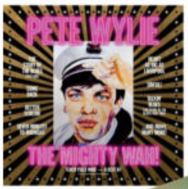
Ultravox's reissues have shown how it should be done for a few albums now. The band were troubled by the time they made *Lament*, yet there was much here to cherish – and there's far more to dive into, thanks to an exhaustive boxset showing many potential alternative avenues.

BRONSKI BEAT
THE AGE OF CONSENT
BRONSKI BEAT

electribe 101

PORTISHEAD

THOMPSON TWINS
40TH ANNIVERSARY 3CD DELUXE EDITION
INTO THE GAP



oasis
Definitely Maybe

GIRLS ALOUD

06
THOMPSON TINS
INTO THE GAP
(BMG)

With the band now ready to reassess what they achieved, the crowning glory of their transatlantic success was revisited with the mischievous remixes the trio dotted across their singles. They looked like the perfect pop group and, by their second album together, they sounded like one, too.

07
PETE WYLIE AND THE MIGHTY WAH!
TEACH YSELF WAH!
(CHRYSALIS)

As he admitted to *Classic Pop*, Pete Wylie has been a master of self-sabotage whenever commercial success appeared possible. It's made his career hard to keep track of, so a well thought out Best Of was more necessary for Wylie than many artists. The ideal introduction to a magical world.

08
DAVID BOWIE
ROCK 'N' ROLL STAR!
(PARLOPHONE)

How to make *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars* even better. A six-disc set of one album could have been too much. This being David Bowie, every note of what he was up to in 1971 was endlessly fascinating – and still retained the enigma of how he pulled it off.

09
OASIS
DEFINITELY MAYBE
(BIG BROTHER)

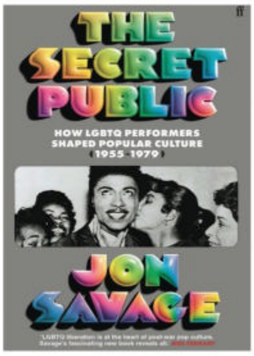
It wasn't as comprehensive as it could have been – where was a live album? – but the 30th anniversary finally saw the mythical first sessions emerge. It proved how hard it was to bring Oasis' live alchemy to bear, while naturally the main album itself remained absolutely incendiary.

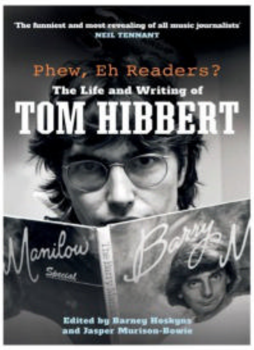
10
GIRLS ALOUD
WHAT WILL THE NEIGHBOURS SAY?
(POLYDOR)

The 3CD reissue of *Sound Of The Underground* was superb evidence of how the group's albums deserve respect beyond the singles. With the fivepiece roaring into top gear on LP2, a similarly thorough overhaul proved even their unreleased tracks were mighty, with the hits meanwhile still bulletproof 20 years on.

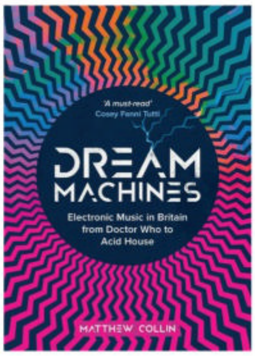
BOOKS

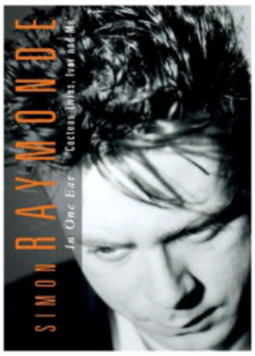
2024'S MUST-READS IN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, BIOGRAPHIES AND NON-FICTION





CARL MAGNUS PALM
ABBA
ON RECORD
PACKAGED • PROMOTED • REVIEWED





01 THE SECRET PUBLIC

JON SAVAGE (FABER)

Set to be viewed as the ultimate authority on the history of LGBTQ performers and their impact on both pop culture and societal acceptance, this encyclopedic volume takes in rock'n'roll, soul, psychedelia, 60s pop, punk, glam and disco, with a cast including Joe Meek, David Bowie, Little Richard, The Velvet Underground, Dusty Springfield and Sylvester.

02 PHEW, EH READERS? THE LIFE AND WRITING OF TOM HIBBERT

TOM HIBBERT (NINE EIGHT)

One of the most influential music writers of all time, Tom Hibbert is memorialised in this superb celebration of his life and work, curated by Barney Hoskins and Jasper Murison-Bowie. The book includes highlights from the late writer's tenure at *Smash Hits* and *Q*, mixed with reminiscences from friends, fans and peers.

03 ABBA ON RECORD

CARL MAGNUS PALM (CMP TEX)

Carl Magnus Palm once again asserts himself as the premier documentarian of the Swedish group's oeuvre. *ABBA On Record* provides a fascinating insight into what went into the quartet's recordings once they left the studio, discussing the many marketing decisions involved in turning a song into a hit. A complete triumph.

04 DREAM MACHINES

MATTHEW COLLIN (OMNIBUS PRESS)

This expansive history of electronica traces the genre back to its roots in post-World War II Britain. Journeying from the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop to 60s psychedelia, the emergence of prog, disco, synth-pop, house, hip-hop and rave, the book also credits lesser-celebrated genres – Hi-NRG, industrialism, dub, ambient and SAW's 80s success.

05 IN ONE EAR: 'COCTEAU TWINS, IVOR AND ME'

SIMON RAYMONDE (NINE EIGHT)

A beautiful meditation on family, friendships and following your muse, this unconventional memoir delves into Raymonde's childhood, work as a musician and the years heading up the Bella Union label. Its diverse cast list of stories includes Scott Walker, Pat Nevin, Metallica and Jeff Buckley.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

LONG-AWAITED RETURNS, THE MODFATHER'S HOT STREAK CONTINUES AND REVELATORY BOXSETS – *CLASSIC POP*'S SENIOR EDITOR STEVE HARNELL PICKS OUT HIS PERSONAL 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

ENSOULMENT

LIAM GALLAGHER JOHN SQUIRE

We had an inkling that *Songs Of A Lost World* could be worth the wait via the band's live show previews, but for me, what amounts to a career-best Cure album really has exceeded all expectations. And it seems I'm not the only one who's been knocked out by the return of Robert Smith and co. The band's 14th studio LP shot to No.1 in the UK, outselling the rest of the Top Five combined. My favourite album of 2024, its emotive meditation on life, death and the fears we all experience in our later years is a remarkable piece of work.

Coincidently, a second long-awaited effort, The The's *Ensoulment*, was my runner-up new release. I'll overlook Matt Johnson's periodic lapses into conspiracy theories and anti-vax cobblers and instead celebrate what amounted to a brooding mid-tempo masterpiece. The LP's Tinder-referencing *Zen & The Art Of Dating* may have betrayed the long gestation period of the album but elsewhere this was a confidently timeless affair.

Paul Weller's hot streak continued with the brilliantly diverse *66*, while a triple vinyl reissue of his compilation *Fly On The Wall* boasted a treasure trove of often-overlooked gems.

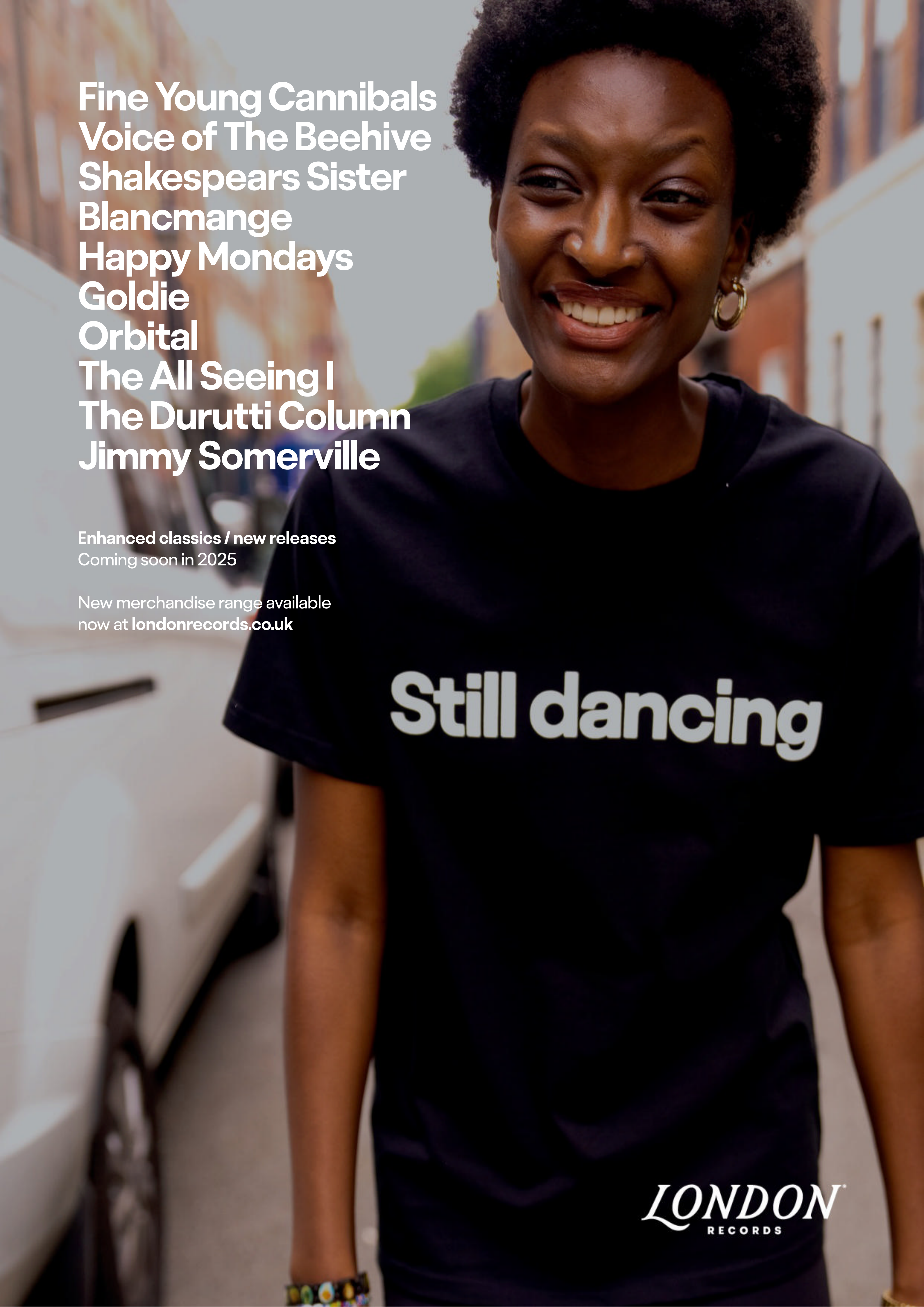
Meanwhile, an early highlight of 2024 came via James' *Yummy*, a consolatory arm around the shoulder that played to the band's anthemic strengths. It was quickly followed by another Spring gem – the collaborative album between John Squire and Liam Gallagher. Alongside Noel's costly divorce, could this stellar hook-up have been the motivation that our kid's big brother needed to finally swallow his pride and green light the Oasis reunion? And as expectation ramps up for those dynamically-priced summer shows, the well-executed *Definitely Maybe* boxset certainly whetted our appetite. Let's not forget, too, support act Cast who weighed in with the perky *Love Is The Call*, packed with plenty of La's-like (John) power pop.

Graham Coxon makes two appearances on my new albums of the year list courtesy of Blur's *Live At Wembley Stadium* release and *City Lights*, the second LP from his side project with Rose Elinor Dougall, The Waeve.

New Order's boxset reissue programme continued to impress with *Brotherhood* – the original album has been a particular favourite of mine for many years.

Meanwhile, Katie Puckrik's buoyant yacht rock compilation eased me into the autumn.

A special mention, too, for the expansive David Bowie boxset *Rock 'N' Roll Star!*, which took a deep dive into his Ziggy Stardust era uncovering all manner of fascinating work-in-progress beauties along the way. ■



Fine Young Cannibals
Voice of The Beehive
Shakespears Sister
Blancmange
Happy Mondays
Goldie
Orbital
The All Seeing I
The Durutti Column
Jimmy Somerville

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LONDON
RECORDS

REVIEWS

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LIVE 94
Janet Jackson, Altered Images

RATINGS

★★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★★ VERY GOOD
★★★ GOOD
★★ PATCHY
★ POOR

Natalie Imbruglia's *London – Live* was recorded at Shepherd's Bush Empire. We review the album on page 84.

THE

HOT LIST

NEW RELEASES THAT NEED TO BE ON YOUR CULTURAL RADAR

STEVE HARNELL

1
Orbital
A Beginner's Guide

❶ A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

ORBITAL

Now available on CD and vinyl, as well as digitally, this one-stop shop from London Records is the perfect introduction to the ground-breaking 30-year career of the Hartnoll brothers. The compilation boasts everything from the duo's early chart hits *Chime*, *Belfast* and *Halcyon*, to fan favourites such as *Lush 3.1*, soundtrack moments like *Beached* and more recent cuts including Sleaford Mods hook-up *Dirty Rat*.

❷ A GIRL CALLED EDDY

A GIRL CALLED EDDY

Counting The Cure's Robert Smith among her fans, A Girl Called Eddy – aka Erin Moran – sees her eponymous 2004 debut album getting the 20th anniversary reissue treatment on blue dusk vinyl and CD courtesy of the Last Night From Glasgow label. The Richard Hawley-produced original release has gained something of a cult following over the years. With vocals reminiscent of Karen Carpenter, the 11-track album traverses Burt Bacharach-esque baroque pop, folk and jazz-rock.

A GIRL CALLED EDDY
2

Bee Stings
BMX Bandits
3

❸ BEE STINGS

BMX BANDITS

Also via Last Night From Glasgow, the influence of Burt Bacharach one more hovers into view on Scot pop band BMX Bandits' 2007 album *Bee Stings* – now making its debut on wax. As well as the three limited edition vinyl variants, LNFG have also produced jars of Bee Stings pure Scottish heather honey in partnership with the Scottish Bee Company. Sweet!

❹ PARTS OF THE PROCESS

GODLEY & CREME

The former 10cc members who revolutionised video-making in the 80s have their complete back catalogue compiled for the first time. It's all here – their seven studio albums released between 1977 and 1988 plus attendant B-sides, standalone singles, 7" edits and extended versions. The 11CD set also features a 28-page book with a 10,000-word essay by Liam Newton.

4
PARTS OF THE PROCESS
THE COMPLETE
GODLEY & CREME

❺ YOUTHQUAKE

DEAD OR ALIVE

DOA's commercial breakthrough album is duly celebrated with a 40th anniversary 41-track 4CD deluxe boxset that includes a remastered version of the original LP, plus multiple remixes of their No.1 *You Spin Me Round (Like A Record)* on the second disc. CD3 features further 7" and 12" cuts, remixes and instrumentals while the final disc captures the band live at London's Hammersmith Odeon in 1985 promoting the album on the Youthquake Tour.

5
DEAD OR ALIVE
YOUTHQUAKE

KIM WILDE
CLOSER

CHERRY RED

★★★★☆

THE POP LEGEND'S FIRST STUDIO LP IN SEVEN YEARS SEES HER RETURN TO A VERY SPECIFIC TIME, TO SHOWCASE WHAT SHE'S BEEN UP TO SINCE

The title and cover of Kim Wilde's 15th studio album are a neat move. Embracing *Close*, the sleeve recreates the 1988 album's arms-across-the-face cover shot. For anyone unaware of its predecessor's heritage, *Closer* simply suggests intimacy as a title and the cover is still a great pose for Wilde to strike.

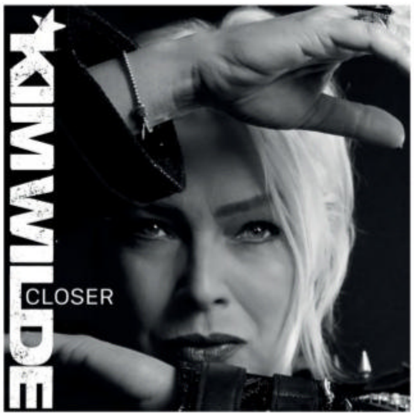
While *Closer* is as eclectic as *Close* in being an instant Best Of for Wilde's talents, that doesn't mean she's simply rattling out 10 songs resembling that album's big hits such as *You Came* (No.3), *Never Trust A Stranger* (No.7) and *Four Letter Word* (No.6). Instead, *Closer* is mature yet still excitable and exciting pop, merged with the extraterrestrial existential questions that Wilde posed on her previous album, 2018's *Here Come The Aliens*.

The opening three songs suggest it'll be Wilde at her poppiest. *Midnight Train* and *Trail Of Destruction* are rave-influenced bangers, all full-tilt keyboards and Kim's commanding vocals carrying the groove with her, rather than the other way around. In between, *Scorpio* is the album's most self-referential song, its riff a callback to *Kids In America*.

The pace then slows right down for *Sorrow Replaced*, where ABC-style strings herald what seems like a traditional ballad, until Midge Ure's stern guest vocals divert the song into harsher territory. That prog mood is enhanced on *Stones And Bones*, a powerful guitar threatening to go full Joe Bonamassa, kept at bay by Wilde's voice at its most strident.

It plays with questions of mortality and alien life forms, with *Rocket To The Moon* a more carefree companion as it stomps about in oversized glam moonboots. *Love Is Love* is even more extreme, recalling *Ooh La La*-era Goldfrapp in its harsh electro mood, combining with Wilde at her breathiest behind the mic. It promptly becomes a classic once the first chorus bursts in at the 75-second mark. It'll be a killer live, too, though Wilde might be wise to finish her setlist with *Love Is Love* as it would frankly knacker Chappell Roan or Sabrina Carpenter.

The album's overall themes are summarised by *Savasana*, as Wilde sings about acid rain and accepting herself over the sort of ambient keyboard washes that were popularised in the early Noughties by Lamb and Kosheen. In truth, while this offers a chance to recover one's breath, it's a disappointingly drab finale after all that's gone before, even though there's a *Vienna* reference for Midge Ure to enjoy on the pre-chorus' heartbeats motif.



Having returned to the UK Top 30 last time out, *Closer* deserves to have Wilde back in the chart. If that doesn't work, an album titled *Closest* should be a total riot. **John Earls**

THE COWARD BROTHERS
THE COWARD BROTHERS

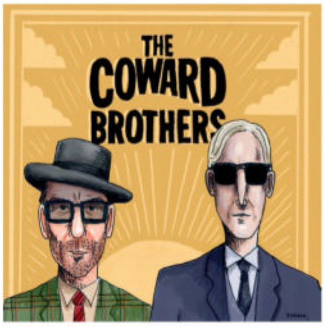
NEW WEST

★★★½☆

ELVIS COSTELLO AND HIS ACCLAIMED COUNTRY PARTNER T BONE BURNETT ARE IN HARMONY, WITH OR WITHOUT THE ACCOMPANYING PODCAST BY THEIR ALTER EGOS

When T Bone Burnett and Elvis Costello first worked with one another 40 years ago, the CD had barely got started and radio was the go-to place for audio content. Now in digitally enabled 2024, the two have reunited and much about our wider cultural landscape has changed, as evidenced by this 20-track offering being the companion to a satirical, Costello-scripted podcast, *The True Story Of The Coward Brothers*.

The duo's ongoing conceit is that Burnett and Costello are musical brothers – one American, one English, both illegitimate sons – whose experience of the music biz post-1956, after they hit big with *My Baby Just Squeals (You Heel)*, is a sad tale of faked deaths, Caribbean exile and generally being ripped off. It's a story the duo, Henry (Burnett) and Howard (Costello), discuss with radio host Sterling Lockhart, played by Harry Shearer. There's another *This Is Spinal Tap* connection, in the podcast being directed by Christopher Guest, who's also credited with providing "Vocals, Acoustic Guitars, Missiles" on the album.



Not that it's essential to know all this before listening, but it helps explain the overall vibe, which is to say the album has a playful quality, as we're invited to listen to The Coward Brothers' forgotten songs and demos. As that idea suggests, these aren't overly polished recordings.

Instead, the album offers a kind of studied looseness overseen by men steeped in their different ways in American roots music. Burnett, remember, is a former member of Bob Dylan's band whose production credits include the soundtrack to *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, while at the height of his nerdy snarl-face, New Wave fame, Costello made a country album, *Almost Blue*.

At times, this doesn't stop matters, when stripped of podcast context, from seeming a little tricksy. The aforementioned *My Baby Just Squeals* grates after a couple of listens. The notion that reverb-heavy *My Baby Just Whistles (Here Come The Missiles)* was the duo's attempt at Cold War relevance doesn't make it any more memorable.

Other tracks grow better with repeated listening. *Tipsy Woman* is one of those melancholy, country-tinged tracks at which Costello has long excelled. There's a stately quality to both *Always* and *World Serious*. Throughout, it's fascinating to work out how and why the duo are trading lines and harmonies. At other times, notably on *Birkenhead Girl*, the mode switches to dirty rock'n'roll.

Possibly not essential by the highest standards of both men, but *The Cowards Brothers* is a deceptively straightforward album that could only have been made by musicians with a sophisticated appreciation of how to make less mean more. **Jonathan Wright**

HIFI SEAN & DAVID McALMONT
TWILIGHT

PLASTIQUE

★★★★½

Not content with releasing one of 2024's finest albums, last August's *Daylight*, Hifi Sean & David McAlmont have wasted no time whatsoever with a companion entitled *Twilight*, which is an early shout for becoming one of 2025's best. Whereas *Daylight* was all up, sunshiney and banger-driven, *Twilight* is a more muted and atmospheric affair entirely, designed for long nights and lovers. In fact, it's actually being released on Valentine's Day in case you needed a last-minute gift for a paramour.

Billed as "a 12-track night drive from dusk 'til dawn", *Twilight* glides out through the empty cities towards the open skies and captures the bleary, cosy hours before dawn perfectly with the addition of choral fragments, birdsong and even Sean's pups Fred and Barney on sound effects duty.

Opening the set with the Blessed Madonna-assisted *The Comedown*, a futurist harmonic-type glow that perfectly evokes the brain unscrambling from the excess of the hours before, *Twilight* is like a welcoming cuddle telling you that everything's gonna be alright. McAlmont is a star throughout – seriously, has there ever been a bad record that's featured him? – flickering between voluptuous excess and Julie London-soothe. He's found the perfect partner in Sean, as this third collaboration proves – it's no wonder that he's claimed it's his favourite of the three albums so far.

Together with Sean's soundscapes, that move from glowing soft focus tumbles on the title track, fracturing sparkles on *Night Drive*, malfunctioning rave on *Sorry I Made You Cry* to an astral quiet storm-esque warmth on *Star*, a shuffling velvet ecstasy on *High With You* and the exquisite Air-like dreaminess of *Driftaway*.

Not a moment is wasted, and nothing outstays its welcome, such is the economic beauty of these jewels and the skills of this dazzling duo. *Twilight* has all the ingredients of a future classic, and one which will be reached for to soundtrack many more late nights. **Ian Wade**

Hifi Sean & David McAlmont
TWILIGHT

FRANZ FERDINAND
THE HUMAN FEAR

DOMINO

★★★★½

It's surprising to learn elsewhere in this issue that Franz Ferdinand needed the tour for their 2022 compilation *Hits To The Head* to be reminded that the common denominator in their singles is that they're fun.

There haven't been enough Franz albums: this is only their sixth in 21 years. But, 2009's cautious *Tonight* apart, they have always sounded like they were built for fun. So it proves here. Opener and first single *Audacious* sets the tone, the most obvious nod to their work with Sparks in its heightened drama. It's followed by *Everydaydreamer*, which is as close as the album will come to a ballad, despite being driven by Audrey Tait's militaristic drumming.

The magnificent *Hooked* is where *The Human Fear* really takes flight. As full-on electronic as Franz have got, it's like Justice's famed remix of *The Fallen*, only with the band's songwriting front and centre. If *Take Me Out* was the thrill of the chase then *Hooked* is equally thrilling about the life that you can have once you've found them.

Black Eyelashes is just as inventive. It's intricate, it's Eastern, it's, well, audacious. It also sounds like it'll offer you outside at any moment as it hurtles as quickly as it can towards a chorus. *Bar Lonely* is even more pugnacious, a taut stomp where Franz sound like The Sensational Alex Kapranos Band.

The ridiculous *Cats* sees the frontman fully off the leash, if that's an appropriate analogy for a song about yearning to be feline and on the prowl. *The Birds* is the most explosive song of all. It's essentially about social anxiety in the online age, but really it's one long cathartic howl. Like the rest of album six, it's magnificent. It's also a ton of fun, and there won't be enough of that until Franz Ferdinand get their arses into gear for album seven, probably in another five years. At least we'll have this to lift everyone's mood until then. **JE**

FRANZ FERDINAND
THE HUMAN FEAR

RITZ RESTUARANT
JAN/FEB 2025
CLASSIC POP
BEST NEW RELEASE

© Oliver Matich

WILLIAM ORBIT
WFO

STRANGE CARGO

★★★½☆

© Eva Pentel

Having sashayed back in 2022 with *The Painter* after eight years, William Orbit seems to have retreated from the spotlight, releasing his latest album solely via Bandcamp. After Beth Orton, Katie Melua and Georgia all featured on *The Painter*, *WFO* is wholly instrumental.

If that implies that Orbit could be heading back to his *Strange Cargo* ambient series, think again. The first half of *WFO* is a thrilling return to beats, his most uptempo grooves since Bassomatic. *Concrete Butterfly* borrows back the pulse that Bicep owed to Orbit in the first place, while *JD 800 ooo* soon builds into a trampolining bounce, a relative rarity from Orbit in melding the piano and strings of his *Pieces In A Modern Style* works with the dancefloor.

The jungle-tinged *Crouch End Massive* is as frenetic as Orbit has ever got – it's a delight to hear him get so worked up – before *Royal Flush* feels like he's partying with the soundtrack of a Patrick Troughton-era *Doctor Who* story.

The second half is more familiar: still frequently gorgeous, especially the semi-acoustic bop *Big Country*, but alongside the more kinetic tracks it feels less adventurous. While the spacey *Adapted From Symphony* earns its eight-minute runtime, the 10-minute drifting closer *Gleam Of The Deep* is anticlimactic in rounding off an album which started so thrillingly.

Considering *The Painter* had been released by Warner, it's hard to know where *WFO* leaves Orbit. Despite its glitchy title, the opening *G1550* has the inventive pulse that attracted Madonna, Blur and All Saints. If *A Day At The Seaside* is enjoyable as it takes you there, casual fans will still know exactly where Orbit is headed from its first distant seagull onwards.

Ultimately, as wildly exciting as *WFO* can be, it doesn't quite justify its 75-minute length and a producer as gifted as William Orbit should have seen where to make the edits. That's probably not the point of such an exploratory record. But there's a fantastic beacon of pop in here somewhere. **JE**

LAUREN MAYBERRY
VICIOUS CREATURE

EMI

★★★★☆

© Charlotte Patmore

In 2022, Chvrches signed to major label Island, a year after the band's fourth Top 10 album *Screen Violence* had featured Robert Smith on the single *How Not To Drown*.

The trio clearly wanted to shake things up, but that restlessness brought singer Lauren Mayberry's career into focus. She was only 25 when debut album *The Bones Of What You Believe* came out. A decade on, Mayberry wanted to explore who she was now, on her own.

Mayberry insists there will be more Chvrches, but her first solo record is an often remarkable step to the side from what she's sung before. Although made with major pop producers including Greg Kurstin and Tobias Jesso Jr, *Vicious Creature* is especially excellent when Mayberry rocks out. *Sorry, Etc* is brutal punk but with a killer chorus, while *Punch Drunk* is better still, largely because it sounds like one massive chorus. If there was any justice, it'd be Mayberry's *Song 2*.

Something In The Air and the Ultravox-infused *Mantra* most clearly have Chvrches' DNA in them, but they come either side of mighty relationship drama *Anywhere But Dancing*, which isn't so much heartbreaking as a knife to the throat. *Change Shapes* is similarly incisive, but this time comes wrapped in an addictive hook, while *Sunday Best* has the same dramatic pop sonics yet a tenderness at its core.

Only the album-closing love song *Are You Awake?* falters: *Sunday Best* hopes Mayberry's affections are requited. Now that they are, *Are You Awake?* is oddly bland, especially after everything that's gone before.

Since the three members of The xx began releasing diverse, colourful solo albums, it would be strange if they returned to their effective but monochromatic world when they reform. *Vicious Creature* seems a similar marker for both Mayberry and Chvrches. Hopefully the band can find a way to utilise the instinctive, infectious rock that Mayberry suddenly shows such an aptitude for. **JE**

DAVID GRAY
DEAR LIFE

LAUGH A MINUTE/SECRETLY DISTRIBUTION

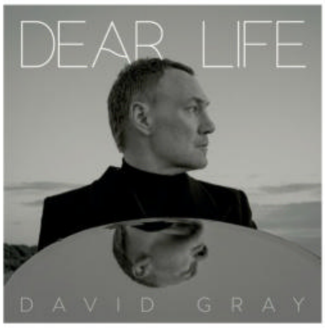
★★★★☆

Self-described as being a "reckoning with stuff that's been building up like static for years", David Gray's 13th album finds everyone's favourite head-bobbing troubadour posing, and valiantly attempting to answer, an arsenal of existential questions. What is the true meaning of love? (*I Saw Love*) What happens when we shuffle off this mortal coil? (*That Day Must Surely Come*). And, on multiple occasions, where exactly is our little blue planet heading?

"It's gone and it's never coming back," appears to be the bleak answer on *Eyes Made Rain*, an ecological lament which proves the singer-songwriter hasn't fallen down the rabbit hole of climate change conspiracy theories since 2021 predecessor *Skellig*. If that all sounds a little heavy, then Gray still possesses the lightness of musical touch – delicate acoustics, subtle synths, skittering electronic beats – that made *White Ladder* so ubiquitous nearly a quarter of a century ago.

Singing For The Pharaoh, a playful self-assessment of his purpose and privilege as a musician, would undoubtedly have dominated the radio during Gray's imperial phase. Likewise, *Plus & Minus*, a charming duet with emerging Londoner Talia Rae which combines house piano, relationship woes and an infectious melody that threatens to burst into *Grease*'s *You're The One That I Want*. Meanwhile, in a neat bit of pop circuitry, *After The Harvest* finds him adopting the rhythmic flow of Ed Sheeran, just one of many singers who have followed in Gray's loop-pedal footsteps.

That's not to say Gray hasn't expanded his musical horizons. Inspired by a piece from America's first ever female Poet Laureate Louise Bogan, *Leave Taking* is an audacious mini-suite which pairs meditations on goodbyes with fluttering flutes and jazzy horns. In contrast, the closing *The First Stone* is a spacious break-up tale guided by a shimmering guitar. There's even an attempt to channel Fela Kuti on the Afrobeat-tinged *Future Bride*. The cathartic approach has undeniably paid off. **Jon O'Brien**



© Robin Grierson

CYMANDE
RENASCENCE

BMG

★★★½☆

Sampled both legally (De La Soul) and illegally (Fugees), cult heroes Cymande have been championed in Spike Lee movies *Crooklyn* and *25th Hour* as well as being hailed as a formative influence on both breakbeat and British rare groove. And the band's reputation has continually grown since their original swansong, 1974's *Promised Heights*.

Self-described as a spiritual and sonic follow-up, *Renascence* deserves to achieve the crossover success that eluded the Londoners first time around.

Life-affirming lead single *Chasing An Empty Dream* provides a Blaxploitation-friendly blend of sweeping strings, tight rhythms and multi-layered horns. Boasting a magnetic vocal from BRIT Award winner Celeste, *Only One Way* evokes the sumptuous soulful balladry that defined Adele's last blockbuster, while *Road To Zion* and *Heart Of The Willing* are the kind of late-night slow jams that would be all over Smooth FM if they ever updated their playlists.

Producer Ben Baptie allows the tight-knit band – most notably founder members Steve Scipio and Patrick Patterson – plenty of opportunity to flex their musical muscles, particularly on the instrumental workout *Sweeden* (spelling doesn't seem to be their strong point) and the lengthy intro of Jazzie B collaboration *How We Roll*. If 2022's documentary *Getting It Back* piqued your interest, then *Renascence* has plenty to maintain it. **JO**

CYMANDE
RENASCENCE

JOAN ARMATRADING
HOW DID THIS HAPPEN AND WHAT DOES IT NOW MEAN

BMG

★★★★☆

In a career dating back to the early 70s, Joan Armatrading has achieved just about *everything* an artist could want, precisely by refusing to be pigeonholed. She's been nominated for Grammys in both the Rock *and* Blues categories, been given a Lifetime Achievement gong by the Radio 2 Folk Awards and earned a CBE. Recently, in 2023, the artist's first classical piece, *Symphony No. 1*, was performed by the Chineke! Orchestra.

JOAN ARMATRADING
How did this happen and what does it now mean

The latter endeavour inspired an album Armatrading wrote, produced, played, programmed and engineered entirely herself. But rather than being classically influenced, this is a refreshingly contemporary collection that displays her many strengths.

Evocative keyboards and sinewy basslines course through many songs – led by *25 Kisses*' electronic underbelly, while *Back And Forth* and *Now What* are instrumentals influenced by blues and jazz respectively. The indie-leaning *Someone Else* and piano-led title track show a poppier side.

Thematically, her 21st album isn't autobiographical. Instead, it's an attempt to make sense of things around her, both in personal relationships or on a global events level.

Strikingly modern and impeccably crafted, this is another gem in Armatrading's impossible-to-categorise career. **Annie Zaleski**

SAINT ETIENNE
THE NIGHT

HEAVENLY

★★★★☆

Long-time admirers of Saint Etienne will be used to the treats that the group release for the fans each Christmas, which usually comprise of represses of limited gear or older fanclub material. This year, also given a low-key full release, *The Night* is a whole new album.

In a similar vein to 2021's *I've Been Trying To Tell You*, it finds the trio in ambient atmosphere vignette mode, with spoken-word, sound effects and half-shadows of songs and moods.

It's perfect for the "Occasional lighting and snuggle under a quality rug" set, acting like a diffuser easing your passage into sleep.

SAINT ETIENNE
"THE NIGHT"

Co-produced alongside Augustin Bousfield, who also worked on *IBTTTY*, *The Night* uses echo and space, nods of dub and folk, and snatches of crystalline guitars and birdsong to build its world. It's autumn, an early night after *Only Connect*, an escape into the well-worn corners of your record collection, sinking into your own interior where it's okay to disengage.

There's not much in the way of choruses, with *Gold* and *Preflyte* the nearest to conventional songs but if you're already onboard the Etienne caravanette, you'll be used to the spectrum of their back catalogue offering something for everyone. With a more regular pop LP rumoured to follow in 2025, it's better to think of *The Night* as a whole piece. A balm. A wonder. **IW**

NATALIE IMBRUGLIA
LONDON – LIVE

DEMON

★★★★☆

Although billed as the 25th anniversary tour for her debut LP *Left Of The Middle*, the resulting shows in 2022 were also the first for Natalie Imbruglia's then-new record, *Firebird*. Indeed, it was Imbruglia's first tour in seven years.

Two years on, this is also her first live album. Imbruglia's not primarily known as a road warrior, but *London – Live*, which was recorded at Shepherd's Bush Empire, demonstrates both the variety of her back catalogue and similarly versatile voice.

NATALIE IMBRUGLIA
LONDON-LIVE

Across 18 songs (12 on vinyl), the big hits such as *Wishing I Was There* and *Torn* are still performed with the passion of a newcomer, while the teasing funk of *One More Addiction* and *City*'s intimate blues are revealed as hits that never were. It's doubtful anyone would come to an Imbruglia live album for *Left Of The Middle* album track *Pigeons & Crumbs*, but it's subtly powerful pop, sung like a dream.

The songs from *Firebird* also show why it returned her to the Top 10, its title track in particular, sumptuous piano blues demonstrating how her music matured while the mainstream was looking the other way.

With *Firebird* seeing Imbruglia overcome writer's block and the singer suggesting that album seven isn't far off now she's suddenly become prolific again, *London – Live* isn't so much a stopgap as a chance for casual fans who only know Imbruglia's first two records to catch up. **JE**

MOONCHILD SANELLY
FULL MOON

TRANSGRESSIVE

★★★★☆

The title *Full Moon* suggests Moonchild Sanelly is about to be fully unleashed on the South African pop star's third studio album. That proves to be the case on a bombastic offering that's nevertheless more coherent than 2022's lockdown-inspired, heavily collaborative *Phases*.

Replete with numerous full-on bangers, it's a party-focused force for good and a body positive statement of empowerment all at once. "If I had a big, big booty, I'd fuck up the world," raps Sanelly on *Big Booty*, before issuing a swift correction to herself: "Oh, I do, and I already am".

MOONCHILD SANELLY
FULL MOON

With her distinctive blue hair, bright platform boots and sports socks, Sanelly appears to be on a love-bombing mission in a bid to capture her audience's affections, partnering up in recent years with big names such as Beyoncé, Self Esteem, Ezra Collective and Gorillaz.

Full Moon continues the charm offensive, with some well-crafted, catchy numbers, which are deceptively impressive when you actually take a closer look under the bonnet.

Gqom-heavy hip-hop and kwaito-laced soundbeds infuse heavy-hitters such as *Falling* and *Gwara Gwara*, while *To Kill A Single Girl (Tequila)* – a pick-me-up remedy in musical form – takes melodic amapiano to new heights on a song about what it feels like when you've got too smashed and you can't help feeling sorry for yourself. **Jeremy Allen**

BROOKE COMBE
DANCING AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

MODERN SKY

★★★★☆

Since going viral with her cover of *Yes Sir, I Can Boogie* in 2021, Scottish singer Brooke Combe has largely been associated with indie – she's supported a host of the genre's artists such as Miles Kane, features on Courteeners' new LP and is produced by The Coral singer James Skelly.

It's a tag that frustrates Combe, who sees herself as an old-school soul singer. Although Skelly is still Combe's main producer, she also has Michael Kiwanuka associate Paul Butler of The Bees involved in her debut album.

DANCING AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD
BROOKE COMBE

Listen to *Dancing At The Edge Of The World* and it's a mystery how that indie tag took hold. This is defiant vintage soul, from the handclapping stomp of *The Last Time* to the riotous *L.M.T.F.A.*, which lyrically is an explicit update of *Respect*, but whose message is timeless.

Combe can cope with ballads just fine, as shown on *If I Could Only Be Yours*, but she's best at taking on the world and dancing around it. *Guilt* has a buzzing guitar solo to offset its message of doubt, while *Lanewood Pines*' rolling piano is pure 70s groove.

Only the opening *This Town*'s message of small town drudgery connects with indie escapism, and that's got glissando strings you don't get from The Rifles. Combe's been building towards something special, and her apprenticeship pays off here. **JE**

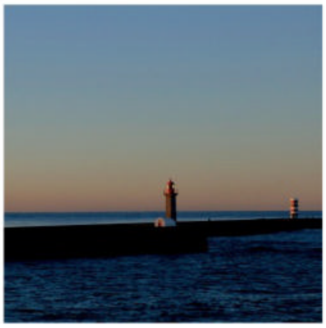
Young Knives
LANDFILL

YOUNG KNIVES
LANDFILL

GADZOOKS

★★★½☆

Last seen on *Never Mind The Buzzcocks*' identity parade and naming their second post-reunion album after the Noughties indie insult, you'd be forgiven for thinking the Dartnall brothers had become defeatist. Yet their worldview stays gleefully surrealist. Yard Act have co-opted the Knives' sharp-turn semi-spoken indie, back here on *Cause & Effect*, while the brothers return the favour by merging Yard Act's synth riot on *No Sound*. Some songs can veer into indulgent prog whimsy, storytelling at the expense of a tune. But for unlikely singalongs, they're hard to beat. **JE**



WEST 11
ATLANTIC COAST HIGHWAY

XENON

★★★☆☆

Featuring Beth Hirsch, heard on Air's *Moon Safari*, ex-Lush bassist Phil King and Mark Shaw, who cut his teeth in Crewe band The Train Set in the 80s, West 11 constitute an indie supergroup. Of course, supergroups are often less than the sum of their parts, but not this time. Recorded with the assistance of, among others, sometime Morrissey sideman Boz Boorer, *Atlantic Coast Highway* mixes up guitar pop, jazz and bossa nova to evoke a sun-drenched journey. A gentle delight, although a few more colours in the sonic palette wouldn't go amiss next time. **JE**

MATT BERRY HEARD NOISES

MATT BERRY
HEARD NOISES

ACID JAZZ

★★★★☆

While so often actors' albums are half-hearted side projects, it can sometimes seem as if Matt Berry's screen work is his moonlighting job. *Heard Noises* is the *What We Do In The Shadows* and *Toast Of London* star's 13th album, seeing him move from pastoral, Nick Drake-like folk-pop and English psych-rock to a more American-styled sound. Unashamedly retro, such as on the Steely Dan feel of *Wedding Photo Stranger* and Stax-y *There Are Monsters*, it's one of the most joyous albums you're likely to hear in 2025. **Steve O'Brien**

the singing winds pt.3

KELE
THE SINGING WINDS PT. 3

KOLA

★★½☆☆

Bloc Party's 2022 LP *Alpha Games* returned them to their electrifying best, but it's been hard to focus on the band's re-emergence with Kele Okereke releasing three solo albums either side of it. Obviously, artists shouldn't be criticised for being prolific, but *Pt. 3*'s reliance on guitar and loop pedal inevitably makes for a similar feel throughout. Beautiful as Kele's voice is, only the elegant *Kintsugi* stands out from the atmosphere of busking at its artiest. Taking the best of his trilogy and letting the repetition slide would have been a more interesting move. **JE**

C DUNCAN
IT'S ONLY A LOVE SONG

C DUNCAN
IT'S ONLY A LOVE SONG

BELLA UNION

★★★½☆

For anyone who thinks of Glasgow multi-instrumentalist Chris Duncan as a leftfield artist, his fifth album may come as something of a shock. From its yacht rock-infused title track onwards, it's clear Duncan is, for now at least, a purveyor of lush and unapologetically romantic orchestral pop that at times calls to mind 70s soft-rock singer-songwriters such as Gilbert O'Sullivan. That's not meant as a criticism, because his songs, which deal with his love for his husband but also grief and death, have an emotional depth that repay careful listening. **JW**

CIRCA WAVES
DEATH & LOVE

CIRCA WAVES
DEATH & LOVE PT. 1

LOWER THIRD

★★★☆☆

Back after singer Kieran Shudell's emergency heart surgery, his band return to the early energy that made *T-Shirt Weather* an indie club favourite. The infectious *Le Bateau* similarly has a chorus built for the ages, while *Like You Did Before* has a new angular intensity. A move into a more emotive, panoramic sound is less surefooted, too similar to any number of guitar bands on *Everything Changed*'s balladry. Only lasting nine songs feels skimpy when there's the occasional filler. But there's enough insistent choruses to merit their tours reaching ever-bigger venues. **JE**

HELEN GANYA

HELEN GANYA
SHARE YOUR CARE

BELLA UNION

★★★★☆

In 2021, Helen Ganya's grandmother, the Scottish-Thai singer's last surviving grandparent, died. Distraught at the idea of losing connections to her mother's family, Ganya began writing down her memories of summer holiday visits to north-east Thailand. A new way of working opened, as Ganya also embraced the idea of putting Thai sounds at the centre of her electronica-rich music. It's all resulted in a set that's polished, richly textured and builds beautifully to elegiac closer *Myna*, a duet in which British-Nigerian singer Tony Njoku takes the part of Ganya's late grandfather. **JW**

THE VEILS
ASPHODELS

THE VEILS
ASPHODELS

V2

★★★★☆

Two decades after debuting with melodramatic indie-rock opus *The Runaway Found*, Finn Andrews' collective have become favourites of directors including Tim Burton and David Lynch. The pairing makes sense, given the cinematic bent of their seventh album. Driven by brittle piano, formidable strings, and lyrics inspired by greats including Hieronymus Bosch and Federico García Lorca, Andrews weaves together an achingly beautiful album here exploring life's big ideas. Fans of The National and later Talk Talk will find much to love. **AZ**

NICK HEYWARD NORTH OF A MIRACLE

DEMON

★★★★☆

THE SOLO CATALOGUE OF HAIRCUT ONE HUNDRED'S FRONTMAN HAS LONG BEEN NEGLECTED. NOW WITH THE BAND REUNITED, THAT'S FINALLY STARTING TO CHANGE.

There's long awaited, and then there's the 43-year gap between Haircut One Hundred's only LP with Nick Heyward and their forthcoming reunion album that's about to arrive in early 2025.

Heyward has discussed the fallout from *Pelican West* before, and that album's superb 40th anniversary boxset was a reminder that some of his debut solo LP was initially intended for the Haircuts. *North Of A Miracle* was a big deal in 1983 – it went Top 10, with three of its four singles just missing the same feat – but it's only now getting a comprehensive reissue, with 2010's 2CD missing a few extras.

Indeed, Heyward's whole catalogue is overdue some love. Clashing with new Haircut One Hundred wouldn't be the right time, but the lack of reissues for his other albums is criminal: 1988's *I Love You Avenue* and Heyward's tremendous LP *The Apple Bed* on Creation aren't so much lost classics as beautiful records which have become so obscure they're effectively folk memories, their existence doubted even by the elders.

Huge credit, then, to Demon for finally giving solo Heyward his due via a 3CD reissue (and half-speed remastered vinyl), which fully lays out the path of what the singer-songwriter did next. One disc comprises B-sides, early versions, instrumentals and the fizzing 12" of *Whistle Down The Wind*.

CD3 is especially fascinating as it features Heyward's post-*Miracle* standalone singles *Love All Day* and *Warning Sign*, plus two wholly unreleased songs. *Teach Til You Reach* was planned as a single. Lyrically, it hasn't aged well – *you* could join Heyward's harem of ladies for every day of the week, you lucky girl – but its chorus will follow you around for months. Only the backing vocals exist for *Kiss Those Tears Goodbye*, but the version here lets you frug about to its full-tilt Britfunk.

If you need reminding, the original album itself is exactly what Heyward should have done after *Pelican West*: keeping the band's energy, while progressing as a songwriter via the elegant *On A Sunday* and *The Day It Rained Forever*. Beatles associate Geoff Emerick's production mostly avoids 1980s pitfalls, letting Heyward shine among *Take That Situation*'s franticness and *The Kick Of Love*'s mischievous jazz pianos.

Nick Heyward
North of a Miracle

It isn't perfect – the live aspect included on the 2010 reissue has been dropped, when a fourth CD of the full November '83 London Dominion show would have been a far better move. But if those budgetary concerns mean we instead now get to trace how *Atlantic Monday* became such a magnetic imaginary spy film theme, so be it. Hopefully, Demon can now start to investigate Nick Heyward's other eight albums with a similar zeal. **John Earls**

ERASURE
TOMORROW'S WORLD / SNOW GLOBE / THE VIOLET FLAME

MUTE

★★★☆☆ / ★★★☆☆ / ★★★★☆

Quite what Erasure's catalogue team are doing with the duo's vinyl releases is a head-scratcher, but here are the first three of their 2010s albums back on wax, having last been out in 2016.

Meanwhile, Erasure's recent 2CD reissues of albums that are somewhat scarcer on vinyl, from *I Say I Say I Say* to *Cowboy*, haven't had any represses accompanying the semi-deluxe CDs. It's a mess. A MESS.

Stop ranting, you say? Right. Anyway... any excuse to revisit Erasure is, of course, welcome, with *Tomorrow's World* especially overlooked. Having worked with Ellie Goulding and Tinie Tempah, producer Frankmusik was briefly in vogue, but this was the only major artist whose album he fully produced before heading to L.A.'s underground club scene.

In truth, it was an uncomfortable fit: Frankmusik lacked the edge to bring out Erasure's finest, though the burbling sci-fi dramatics of *I Lose Myself* cut through the polish, reminiscent of their superb cover of Gina X Performance's *No GDM*. But, at just nine songs and 32 minutes, it can't afford filler like shrugging finale *Just When I Thought It Was Ending*.

A Christmas album two years later suggested that Erasure might be heading into nostalgia territory. Their version of *Gaudete* was worthy of the duo's acclaimed festive EP *Crackers International*, fabulously OTT, while some of the new songs like the twinkling *Midnight Clear* should be for life.

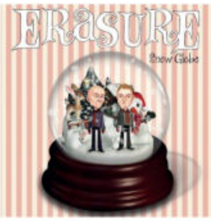
However, the relatively lo-fi production doesn't suit the classics, leaving *Bleak Midwinter* and *Silent Night* sounding like synth-pop novelties, rather than carrying Erasure's usual passion. There are countless worse festive albums, but Erasure have a better one in them than this record made at a low ebb.

That said, Clarke/Bell seem to have bottomed out with *Snow Globe*, because the pair were back on form just nine months later. Helped along by Richard X, *The Violet Flame* was a no-messing return to what Erasure stand for.

It's dramatic, defiant, and there are killer choruses wherever you look. Erasure have been back on top ever since.

Now, how about the self-titled album on vinyl, please? **JE**

erasure
TOMORROW'S WORLD



TALKING HEADS
77

RHINO

★★★★½

© Mick Rock Estate
DEC/JAN 2025
CLASSIC POP
BEST REISSUE

Although Talking Heads' debut album was only reissued on vinyl in 2020, it wasn't given the deluxe treatment. Like The Police with *Synchronicity*, Talking Heads are only now giving fans some luxury options of their LPs.

If *77* isn't quite as extravagant as The Police for demos, then the main prize is undeniably a catch: a previously-unreleased live album from CBGBs.

It's as good an opportunity as any to let people aged under the age of 65 hear what the venue was actually like, from David Byrne's hesitant version of his famed "The name of this band is Talking Heads" introduction to attacking *Take Me To The River* way too fast, possibly because some club regulars wanted them to be as frantic as those Ramones and Television guys.

The live album is in the main 3CD package, with its vinyl version in a 4LP set only available from Rhino and Talking Heads' webstores. It's worth it, with the regular reissue's 2LP vinyl only adding the rarities disc.

In fairness, that disc is a decent effort for an album with only one proper B-side, the disco-tinged *I Wish You Wouldn't Say That*. The famed rare Acoustic Version of *Psycho Killer* with Arthur Russell on cello is tense and nervous in a far sparser manner than the familiar take, even if it's nowhere near 'acoustic'. Classic standalone debut single *Love Goes To Building On Fire* is here, too.

The main album isn't as expansive as Talking Heads' Brian Eno years, but it doesn't need to be. If you only know *Psycho Killer*, prepare to be startled at the otherwise minimal production by Lance Quinn and Jon Bon Jovi's cousin, Tony Bongiovi. It's skeletal, but it still shows Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz could pin down Byrne's flights of fancy with a groove encompassing any mood you wanted them to create. They'd get busier than the spartan funk of *The Book I Read*. But all the colours were already here. Released now, *77* would still be like nobody else, let alone set apart from anyone at CBGBs. **JE**

TALKING HEADS 77

VARIOUS ARTISTS
NOW YEARBOOK '77 EXTRA/ NOW 12" 80s VOLUME 1/ NOW 12" 80s: 1984 PART 1/ NOW 80s DANCEFLOOR: SYNTH

NOW

★★★★☆ / ★★★★½ / ★★★★½ /
★★★★½

NOW's convoy of joy continues with yet more wonderfulness, via offerings for fans of all strands of pop music.

For once, there isn't a regular *Yearbook* edition, presumably as the NOW team are trying to figure out what to do with 1976. To fill the gap, *Yearbook '77 Extra* is another 3CD of solid classics. 1977's regular *Yearbook* was magnificent, but it still missed out gems such as Hot Chocolate's seismic *Put Your Love In Me*, The Dooleys' *Love Of My Life*, Harold Melvin And The Blue Notes' *Don't Leave Me This Way*, Paul McCartney's *Maybe I'm Amazed* and Iggy Pop's *Lust For Life*. This scoop-up is as good as the main event, with so many tracks that are instant headrushes, even for people who weren't yet born then.

The *12" 80s* series reaches the first instalment of 1984. That was a very, *very* good year, as evidenced by the sheer quality here: Frankie's *Two Tribes (Annihilation Mix)* is the reworking all the other 480 *Two Tribes* mixes have to call Sir, while you also get Shannon's *Let The Music Play*, Propaganda's *Das Testament Des Dr Mabuse* as well as Divine's unstoppable *You Think You're A Man*. Then there's the exciting exclusive of Queen's *I Want To Break Free* 12", only previously available on CD via a 1992 mail order compilation. Yes, really. It's a textbook extended version, typical of NOW's attention to detail. Full marks, no notes. Bring on part two.

For vinyl lovers wanting to catch up on the series, there is now a 5LP *12" 80s* round-up, with sparklers from 1980-82. NOW CD lovers will know how good *Physical*, *Why*, *Love Come Down*, *Shy Boy* and *Ghost Town* are. The boxset is the cream of an already creamy crop that condenses the best of an era when the 12" was just starting to get going.

That's not all from NOW: the "dancefloor" name might suggest more remixes, but these are simply the synth triumph singles of the era. Which means *CP* readers may already own them, but here's a superb starter kit that's *all* the killer: *I'm Not Scared*, *Domino Dancing*, *Sexcrime*, Yello's *The Race* and The Human League's *Hard Times*. A full house of fabulous tunes.

Ian Wade

COLLECTORS EDITION
NOW
YEARBOOK
77

12"
80s
VOLUME ONE

NOW
12" 80s
1984

NOW
EIGHTIES
DANCEFLOOR
SYNTH

SIMPLE MINDS
SPARKLE IN THE RAIN

UMC

★★★★☆

© Adrian Boot

A transitional bridge between the ambient art-rock of *New Gold Dream* and stadium pomp of *Once Upon A Time*, you can see why, for some purists, *Sparkle In The Rain* signalled the beginning of the end for Simple Minds' imperial phase.

Fresh from his work on U2's *War*, producer Steve Lillywhite leaned into the extra muscle that new drummer Mel Gaynor had brought to the band, while Derek Forbes' bass is so powerful – most famously on the concrete-loosening throb of *Waterfront* – it's no surprise he burst his thumb open in the studio.

Bombastic? A little, perhaps. But come on: is there a more thrilling opening trilogy in rock than *Up On The Catwalk* – with its impossibly glamorous, free-associating nonsense about Nastassja Kinski, friends of Kim Philby and 1,000 postcards from Montevideo – *Book Of Brilliant Things* and *Speed Your Love To Me*? And Side Two runs out of steam slightly, but a misconceived cover of Lou Reed's *Street Hassle* is the only out-and-out dud.

This 4CD 40th anniversary set (a no-frills unexpanded vinyl version is also available) is basically a repackage of the album's previous birthday release from 10 years ago, now embellished with new Dolby Atmos mixes from Bob Clearmountain. Along with the remastered album (overseen by Charlie Burchill), there's a disc of B-sides and extended mixes, a recording of the band's 1984 homecoming show at Glasgow's Barrowlands and a BBC Radio One session.

All of which is fine, as far as it goes, but it feels like a missed opportunity not to include the album's early instrumental demos, which captured the band mid-transformation, minus the crash-wallop. Not that the crash-wallop isn't magnificent in its own way, you understand.

Paul Kirkley

SIMPLE MINDS
SIMPLE MINDS THE HEART AND THE SPARK

KING
OF
AMERICA
&
OTHER
REALMS

ELVIS COSTELLO
KING OF AMERICA & OTHER REALMS

UMC

★★★★☆

CAPITALISING ON A REISSUE OF COSTELLO'S MID-80s CLASSIC, THIS SPRAWLING COLLECTION ILLUSTRATES AMERICA'S ENDURING INFLUENCE ON HIS SONGWRITING

It's 1986, and Elvis Costello is summarising thoughts of the land behind *King Of America*'s title. "There's no country on earth with more righteous and noble principles," he tells *Interview.* "And there's never been a country where those principles have been abused as horribly."

This idea, Costello explains, lies behind the album's opener, the swaggering and opulent *Brilliant Mistake*, whose satire can't disguise his love for music from across the pond any more than the rest of the record.

That Costello is backed by, among others, members of Elvis Presley's latterday TCB band helps, as does the presence of producer T Bone Burnett.

In leaving *Goodbye Cruel World*'s problems behind, too, he's stumbled on a rich seam of tunes, recorded in L.A. with a timeless feel. From *The Big Light*'s and *Glitter Gulch*'s rockabilly to the waltzing *America Without Tears*, he confirms an enthusiasm for the nation's songcraft displayed on 1981's *Almost Blue*.

Nonetheless, a passionate, definitive *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood* and sorry, earnest *Indoor Fireworks* – complete with reference to *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes* – confirm a depth of feeling and intent matching earlier peaks but absent from his previous outing.

While its title and cover suggest this boxset offers a standard, remastered deep dive into that masterpiece, its five additional CDs, curated by Costello, provide a wider lens. Shorter formats are available, but over three discs of the boxset, our bespectacled hero explores his US-associated adventures ever since, drawing not only on other albums recorded there – including a good chunk of 2010's Burnett-produced *National Ransom* – but also a wealth of delicious rarities. Thus, Costello is heard duetting sweetly with Emmylou Harris on *The Delivery Man*'s *Heart Shaped Bruise* and rehearsing the same album's bonus track, *The Monkey*, with Dave Bartholomew And The Dirty Dozen Brass Band, while gospel group The Fairfield Four transform *That Day Is Done*, co-written with Paul McCartney.

Still, a disc of skeletal demos and another of a raucous yet refined Royal Albert Hall show fascinate the most. The former, after all, includes *Blood And Chocolate*'s *Next Time Round*, a mallet-and-harmonica-heavy *America Without Tears* and *Shoes Without Heels*, which didn't make the *King of America* cut.

The latter disc, meanwhile, combines Costello's work – a richly arranged *I'll Wear It Proudly*, a yearning *Sleep Of The Just*, a stonking *Lovable* – with songs once claimed by the likes of Buddy Holly and Waylon Jennings. If America really is the home of the brave, Costello belongs there, too.

Wyndham Wallace

THE LILAC TIME
ASTRONAUTS

NEEDLE MYTHOLOGY

★★★★☆

At the point The Lilac Time's fourth LP was released, Stephen Duffy's post-Dr Calculus project couldn't have been less fashionable. Landing the same month as Blur's *Leisure*, Spin Doctors' *Pocket Full Of Kryptonite* and Cypress Hill's self-titled debut, *Astronauts* was wilfully out of step from the dominant sounds of the time.

While that may have been a disadvantage when it failed to chart in August 1991, it does mean that, 33 years on, *Astronauts* is less of a timepiece than the year's shoegaze, baggy and grunge. That's clearly the opinion of Needle Mythology co-founder Pete Paphides, the author of a satisfyingly immense booklet which comes with this expanded 3LP/3CD reissue.

Arriving with a demos disc and live compilation, *Astronauts* tends to get lost in The Lilac Time's discography. If your image of the group is of a Nick Drake-riffing folk-rock outfit, then this may come as a surprise: it's actually closer to the sumptuous summer pop of Duffy's solo career. In many ways, via songs such as the sun-dappled *Hats Off Here Comes The Girl* and sitar-assisted *In Iverna Gardens*, it's proto-Britpop, more Ian Broudie than Sandy Denny.

Unjustly shunned on release as it may have been, now is the time to fully embrace an album just that little bit too ahead of its time to be fully appreciated. **Steve O'Brien**

THE GO-BETWEENS
G STANDS FOR GO-BETWEENS VOLUME 3: 2000-2006

DOMINO

★★★★☆

"I don't want to change a thing when it's magic," Robert Forster and Grant McLennan sang on *Magic In Here*, the opener to their first album in a dozen years, 2000's *The Friends Of Rachel Worth*. Things *had* changed: former bandmates were missing, replaced by members of Quasi and Sleater Kinney. But the duo's distinctive songwriting styles still merged as if they'd never stopped collaborating, as on 2003's *Bright Yellow Bright Orange* and 2005's *Oceans Apart*, their last album before McLennan's death.

stands for Go-Betweens

Finally on vinyl, all three albums offer fresh opportunities to revel in, for example, Forster's charming *Surfing Magazines* or McLennan's gentle *Mrs Morgan*. Welcome as their arrival is, fans will also want *Nachtmix 99*, an LP of an acoustic German radio session which trawls their catalogue – together and apart – and showcases an especially delicate *Clouds* and jaunty *Easy Come Easy Go*, led by Forster's piano.

An additional seven CDs offer further lures, not least 14 tunes recorded in 1991 before they split and another 100 rarities, demos and unreleased tunes. That's a lot of hours to spend with two droll middle-aged Aussies, but all who loved this odd couple know that G also stands for Gold. **WW**

LUTHER VANDROSS
NEVER TOO MUCH: GREATEST HITS

LEGACY

★★★★☆

After spending the 1970s collaborating with David Bowie – among other things, his song *Funky Music (Is A Part Of Me)* became *Fascination* on *Young Americans* – and singing backing vocals for A-listers, Luther Vandross finally stepped out as a solo act in 1981. He set the bar high with his debut single, *Never Too Much*, a funky, string-swirled gem that topped the US R&B charts, and the first of 18 UK Top 40 hits.

That classic kicks off this stellar career-spanning hits collection, which arrives alongside the documentary *Luther: Never Too Much*. This 2CD/2LP set illuminates Vandross' gifts as a vocalist, songwriter and interpreter. Throughout the 80s and up to his death in 2005, the silky crooner dabbled in mainstream pop (the funky *Give Me The Reason*), sinewy R&B (*Take You Out*), luxurious ballads (*Here And Now*, *Dance With My Father*), and lovely duets (the Mariah Carey-featuring *Endless Love*).

Luther Vandross
NEVER TOO MUCH: GREATEST HITS

Of particular interest on *Never Too Much* are two previously unreleased songs: a haunting, melancholy cover of The Beatles' *Michelle*, a recording of unknown origin discovered on a cassette, and the smooth jazz of *Speak Your Love*. Rounding out the set are a Lost Frequencies remix of *Never Too Much* and Louie Vega's reboot of *Get Myself Together*. Given Vandross' versatility and passion, this lives up to its title. **Annie Zaleski**

THE CHARLATANS
UP TO OUR HIPS

BEGGARS ARKIVE

★★½☆☆

As it was released in 1994, The Charlatans' third album is generally deemed Britpop. If only. It's their heaviest LP, with veteran progger Steve Hillage of Gong's murky production helping to bring Mark Collins' guitars to the fore – but at the expense of his bandmates.

This is The Charlatans showing they can jam, man. Which is fine, but the title track is miles away from finding a song and, as a single, *I Never Want An Easy Life If Me And He Were Ever To Get There* drags on as long as its title in its muddy mood. Even when Rob Collins' keyboards are upfront, in *Patrol*, it's to mask the lack of a memorable melody.

There are some highlights: in *Jesus Hairdo*'s loose funk, you can hear what the band are aiming for elsewhere, while bonus track *Subterranean* bounces along giddily, albeit more reminiscent of Inspiral Carpets than The Charlatans.

Tim Burgess sounds more aggressive than usual throughout, but his voice doesn't always suit attack mode. Among the new 2LP's 10 bonus tracks of B-sides, alternative mixes and a Radio 1 session, *Withdrawn* stands out largely because of its vintage Burgess yowl.

Tellin' Stories was just around the corner – and that's where The Charlatans found their groove again. At least the reissue has a superb new sleeve by Burgess' partner Nik Void. **JE**

THE LEMONHEADS
CAR BUTTON CLOTH

FIRE

★★★★☆

Three years after *Come On Feel The Lemonheads*, Evan Dando's personal problems and the effective dissolution of the band – only drummer Patrick Murphy remained – helped ensure that The Lemonheads' fanbase has largely scarpered by the time of *Car Button Cloth*.

Noel Gallagher also ordered the removal of *Purple Parallelogram*, co-written with Dando, from the tracklisting at the last minute.

car
button
cloth
All of these things
sank
the Lemonheads

Yet the album has quietly gained a cult following over the years, and rightly so. Despite Dando playing nearly everything, it's the most varied Lemonheads record and, in *The Outdoor Type*, it's got a prescient anthem for beta males whose beauty resonates more clearly now than it did at the height of Britpop. It also features *If I Could Talk I'd Tell You*, one of those timeless bounces of Dando which sound effortless, yet his subsequent struggles suggest are anything but easy to conjure. Around those, he seemed to want to show he could cope just fine without his band, rocking harder than usual on *Something's Missing* and sludgy instrumental *Secular Rockulidge*.

Purple Parallelogram is still missing here, which is a shame, as bootlegs show it's a catchy romp. But Fire's regular 2LP reissue includes gorgeous unissued piano ballad *Arise* among the B-sides and alt versions. Some albums just require their moment. Right now, *Car Button Cloth* is a triumph. **JE**

THE VERVE
THIS IS MUSIC: THE SINGLES

UMC

★★★★☆

Given Richard Ashcroft's high-profile slot as main support on Oasis' UK reunion tour, it's the perfect time for The Verve to lay claim to a portion of the hunger for 90s comebacks. Enter the vinyl debut of 2004's singles compilation. Culled largely from the band's 90s heyday, the 2LP 14-song collection illustrates that The Verve's expansive psychedelic rock has aged incredibly well.

Early singles *Gravity Grave* and *Slide Away* are fuzz-coated gems with spacious arrangements and buoyant grooves. The melancholy *On Your Own* and string-swept *Lucky Man* showcase a knack for the bittersweet, while other singles from 1997's juggernaut *Urban Hymns* reveal Ashcroft and guitarist Nick McCabe's pop chops.

the verve
verve

This 20th anniversary edition makes a few swaps from the 2004 CD original. Gone are *Urban Hymns*-era unreleased tracks *This Could Be My Moment* and *Monte Carlo*, replaced by the two singles from 2008's comeback album, *Forth*: the strident *Love Is Noise* and Oasis-like *Rather Be*.

Of more interest is the fresh inclusion of the eight-and-a-half-minute full-length version of the band's second single, *She's A Superstar*, which sprawls like a zoned-out shoegaze classic tumbling in zero gravity. *This Is Music* is a nostalgia trip that doubles as a reminder of The Verve's greatness. **AZ**

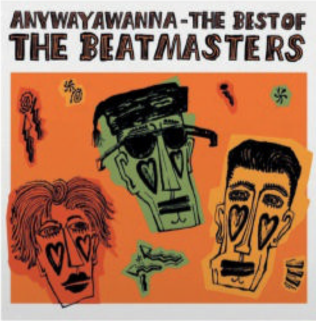
THE BEATMASTERS
ANYWAYAWANNA: THE BEST OF

MUSIC ON VINYL

★★★½☆

Having faded into the background since working on Girls Aloud's *Sound Of The Underground*, The Beatmasters have eased back lately, with vintage house piano singles *Good Old Daze* and *Everyone Dancin'*.

Their return after nearly 20 years is a delight, as at their best the production collective were the perfect mid-point between S'Express mischief and Stock Aitken Waterman. Like much of Rhythm King's catalogue, The Beatmasters' music is only patchily available, so this is a welcome vinyl repress of 2004's 'best of'. (In reality, it's their two albums repackaged.)



Having worked with everyone from Bowie and Depeche Mode to Marc Almond and Pet Shop Boys, they were perhaps best suited as producers: some of their own tracks were fillers that sounded dated even in 1989. But when they got it right, they were magnificent.

Who's In The House is still a strident statement, *Make Me Feel* one of PP Arnold's best pop moments. And then, of course, there's the mighty *Hey DJ* that unleashed Betty Boo onto the public. The inventive *Sarayet-Sayam Sembtae* showed they didn't always need guests or a single to flourish.

Fingers crossed those new singles will herald a full return. And hopefully this reissue heralds a lot more to come from the Rhythm King vaults. **JE**

LYKKE LI

I NEVER LEARN

RHINO

★★☆☆☆

After the inventive electronics of second album *Wounded Rhymes*, Lykke Li pivoted to the slo-mo dramatics of Lana Del Rey for her Greg Kurstin-produced follow-up. *Just Like A Dream* and *Gunshot* were convincingly glamorous in their noirish mood, but it was frustrating for anyone hoping for more futurism to rival the predecessor's *Get Some*. This 10th anniversary vinyl reissue adds the unreleased *Midnight Shining* – a song murkier and more intriguing than much of the regular album. Still, *I Never Learn* remains Li's most successful LP in the UK to date. **JE**

CINERAMA
VA VA VOOM
25

CINERAMA

VA VA VOOM 25

SCOPITONES

★★★½☆

Issued a year after The Wedding Present disbanded, *Va Va Voom* saw David Gedge, with his then partner Sally Murrell, swap no-frills indie for a harmonious blend of Burt Bacharach-inspired orchestral pop, acoustic ballads and the less boorish end of Britpop: *Me Next* echoes Pulp at their most sardonic, while *Kerry Kerry* has the debonair touch of The Divine Comedy. Including a live version recorded at Gedge's At The Edge Of The Sea festival, this 25th anniversary reissue proves it's aged far more gracefully than much of the Cool Britannia crowd. **Jon O'Brien**

HOZIER
UNREAL UNEARTH
UNENDING

HOZIER

UNREAL UNEARTH

ISLAND

★★★★☆

Seemingly destined to be a one-record wonder, Hozier did well to recover for his third album with a tense set distilling classical literature influences without sounding like a terrible old pseud. The original LP was vast, yet he promptly became a rare non-pop act to score a No.1 with *Too Sweet*, which failed to make the original record. That laidback groove is joined by nine non-album cuts. Hozier could have easily released them as a whole new album. With the original LP, it's one of the best recent deluxe versions. If he can keep this up, fair play. **JE**

PLASTIKMAN

MUSIK

NOVAMUTE

★★★★☆

Musik, Richie Hawtin's second album as Plastikman, returns with a fresh remaster from the original tapes. Thirty years on, it's often surprising just how austere this minimal techno classic sounds. Nothing is wasted by the British-Canadian as the Detroit-infused loops of tracks such as the opening *Konception* create trance-like states to disappear into, while the progressive acid house of *Plastique* is little more than a 909, dubby echo and the odd scything synth motif. It's lean, mean and, with a bio-vinyl press, it's green, too. **Jeremy Allen**

N
TWENTY YEARS
TWENTY SONGS
TWO PEOPLE
ONE DAY

VARIOUS ARTISTS

ONE DAY

UMC

★★★★☆

One of the best aspects about Netflix's splendid *One Day* romantic drama series was its choice of music that accompanied key moments. Recognising that, here's an eclectically marvellous new compilation for you to swoon all over again to. Aside from important niggles like "I doubt a graduation party would have featured Jamie Principle's *Your Love* in July 1988", it's a fine array of essential pop music ranging from Rotary Connection and Nico to Inner City and Longpigs. This is perfect fare for anyone who's on their sixth or seventh rewatch. **IW**

THE ASSOCIATES
THE AFFECTIONATE PUNCH

THE ASSOCIATES

THE AFFECTIONATE PUNCH

MUSIC ON VINYL

★★★★☆

If you only know The Associates from *Sulk* and its attendant hits, you're well advised to seek out its predecessor. On their debut – given a straight vinyl repress here – the duo were still paddling in the pools of post-punk, with Billy MacKenzie's glorious operatic croon framed by angular guitar and some beguiling arrangements. *Even Dogs In the Wild* adds a touch of Weimar cabaret and the title track could be an outtake from one of Bowie's Berlin albums. Their finest hour lay ahead, but this is a fascinating staging post en route. **Beth Simpson**

Buffalo tom
[big red letter day]

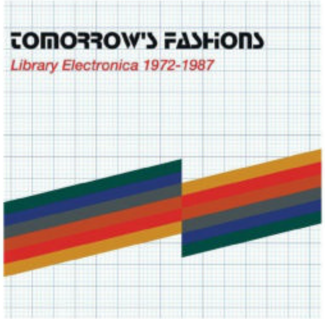
BUFFALO TOM

BIRDBRAIN/LET ME COME OVER/BIG RED LETTER DAY

BEGGARS ARKIVE

★★★★☆

This US trio are criminally underrated, so these vinyl reissues are overdue. Co-produced by Dinosaur Jr's J Mascis, 1990's raw *Birdbrain* is dominated by grunge guitars and post-hardcore energy. Two years on, *Let Me Come Over* boasted prettier melodies and introspective songs – the band cited Neil Young and The Rolling Stones as influences – led by the melancholy *Taillights Fade* and *Mineral*. Buffalo Tom broke through with 1993's *Big Red Letter Day*, home to alt-rock gems (*Sodajerk*) and nostalgic classics (*Late At Night*). **AZ**



VARIOUS ARTISTS

TOMORROW'S FASHIONS: LIBRARY ELECTRONICA 1972-87

ACE

★★★★☆

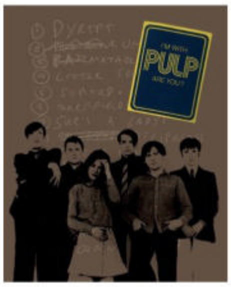
Assembled by Bob Stanley, *Tomorrow's Fashions* covers the days when library composers were just starting to grapple with synths. For anyone who grew up during that era, it's instant catnip. On many of the tracks you can spot the contemporary influences – Rubba's *Space Walk* owes much to Jean-Michel Jarre, whilst *Interface* by Astral Sounds is reminiscent of Hot Butter's *Popcorn*. But the best tracks, such as Trevor Bastow's Syndrum-tastic *Videodisc*, still sound as gleaming and sleek as the future we were all promised on *Tomorrow's World*. **BS**

I'M WITH PULP, ARE YOU?

MARK WEBBER

HAT & BEARD PRESS

★★★★½



Pulp fans can all remember the first time, that moment they were carried away by Jarvis Cocker expressing an idea that was simultaneously improbably romantic, mildly perverse and, for all it reached to express something universal, could have emerged from a kitchen sink drama set in a grimy bedsit.

Those who have experienced this heady feeling include Mark Webber but, where most of us discovered Pulp circa Britpop or later, Webber was there from the beginning, a teenage fan in the 80s. Later, he worked for the band and then, in 1995, became Pulp's guitarist at the height of their fame.

It's a story covered in *I'm With Pulp, Are You?* but don't expect a conventional music memoir. Rather, this is a book of comparatively few words that instead puts the emphasis on reproducing the Pulp ephemera Webber, a self-confessed hoarder, has collected over his years in and around the band. That said, Webber is brilliant at dissecting band dynamics, as when he discusses the "territorial dispute" over who-should-stand-where stage space that broke out between himself and Russell Senior when Pulp first reformed.

Add in a foreword from Cocker, a personal essay on why he loved Pulp as a teenager from *Quietus* co-founder Luke Turner, and a more biographical offering from Simon Reynolds, and this is, in its appropriately idiosyncratic way, one of the best music books of the year. **Jonathan Wright**

33⅓: KATE BUSH – HOUNDS OF LOVE

LEAH KARDOS

BLOOMSBURY

★★★★☆

Musician, writer and academic Leah Kardos is the latest to contribute to Bloomsbury's always readable *33 1/3* brand, here taking a deep dive into Kate Bush's *Hounds Of Love* LP. By concentrating on just one album at a time, the trump card of the *33 1/3* series is it never spreads itself too thinly. This is a microscopic analysis, and as *CP* readers will well know, there's plenty for Kardos to get her teeth into here.

After initial scene setting tracing Kate's emergence as a singular songwriting talent in the late 70s, Kardos knuckles down to the main event, exploring the full evolution of the album including details of its recording. A section on the LP's behind-the-scenes technical information and instrumentation will keep studio geeks happy.

A further strength of the book is the track-by-track overview where Kardos makes fine use of her music theory knowledge to analyse Bush's sophisticated songwriting skills, bringing added value to the usual journalistic insights. Song structures, harmonic motifs and the album's lyrics are all dealt with in detail.

Finally, the LP's second life via Kate's *Before The Dawn* Hammersmith Apollo residency in 2014 is pored over, a must-read section for fans who weren't able to witness it in person.

While secondary sources rather than new interviews populate the text here, this is a well-researched and astute take on a landmark album. **Steve Harnell**

FROM WHAM! TO WOO: A LIFE ON THE MIC

JANEY LEE GRACE

McNIDDER AND GRACE

★★★★☆

Backing singers are some of music's most anonymous figures, but they're often the ones with the most stories. So it is with Janey Lee Grace, who, as support to Mari Wilson, Wham!, Kim Wilde, Boy George, Donna Summer and more, was at the epicentre of 80s pop.

In the last few decades, Grace has reinvented herself as a radio DJ and lifestyle guru, but this is the first time she's laid out her life story.

The book doesn't linger overly on her pre-showbiz days, touching briefly on her Nottingham childhood watching T. Rex and ABBA on *Top Of The Pops* and dreaming of stardom. By page 19, she is hanging out with Gary Numan, Toni Basil and Captain Sensible.

What especially stands out is how brutal showbusiness was in the early 80s. Young women had to be careful answering adverts promising jobs (an innocuous looking ad posted in *The Stage* turns out to be for a topless photoshoot – "I made my excuses and left," she writes), while Grace, at one point, claims that she was sacked from Mari Wilson's band simply for refusing to cut her hair.

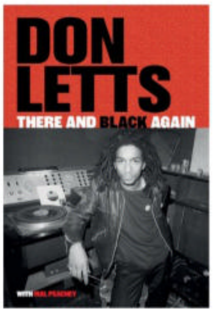
Overall, the mood is upbeat. There is much to laugh at, as she recalls sunning it in Sydney with Rod Stewart and George Michael before returning home to a meal of baked beans in her rented flat. If you're looking for a bracingly honest account of pop as a job in 80s Britain, it's right here. **Steve O'Brien**

THERE AND BLACK AGAIN

DON LETTS

OMNIBUS PRESS

★★★★☆



This personable memoir by the celebrated filmmaker, musician, DJ, social commentator and self-confessed Beatles obsessive Don Letts is a wonderfully involving read. From the outset, Letts acknowledges how nothing in his life was planned or premeditated. Indeed, there's a DIY punk-rock spirit driving the narrative – you can't help but admire his chutzpah or be inspired.

As cinematic as one of Letts' films, this zips along with entertaining rock'n'roll adventures involving The Clash, John Lydon, Bob Marley and Paul McCartney, all while serving up fascinating insights into touchstones in music history.

From his big bang moment of witnessing The Who in concert as a 15-year-old kid to treading the boards with Big Audio Dynamite, the thrill of live music often extends beyond the page as our narrator gifts the reader a backstage pass to landmark shows by the likes of The Wailers and Sex Pistols.

Candid tales of love and loss run parallel to accounts of racism and political struggle, to offer a captivating glimpse of the man behind the shades.

This gloriously told, technicolour tale of a true roots rock rebel is in paperback for the first time and updated to include reflections on the *Rebel Dredd* film and discussions of Don's debut solo album *Outta Sync*. Letts also acknowledges the sad passing of Benjamin Zephaniah, Shane MacGowan, Maxi Jazz, Terry Hall and, perhaps most poignantly, his close friend Sinéad O'Connor. **Dan Biggane**

JANET JACKSON
UTILITA ARENA, BIRMINGHAM

27 SEPTEMBER

★★★★☆

© Solaiman Fazel

THE OPENING NIGHT OF JANET'S TOGETHER AGAIN UK TOUR SEES THE YOUNGEST OF THE JACKSON CLAN KEEP THE ENERGY LEVELS HIGH DURING AN EXPANSIVE 39-SONG SET

When it first hit the road in the US last year, Janet Jackson's Together Again tour was heralded as a celebration of the then 57-year-old's 50 years in showbiz, along with the anniversaries of her albums *The Velvet Rope* and *Janet*.

Now, 18 months later, the first night of her five-date UK Together Again jaunt finds shows refocused to mark 35 years since her radical fourth LP, *Rhythm Nation 1814*, and, well, an extra year in the music biz.

It's been a while since we saw Ms Jackson. Dates around 2015's *Unbreakable* LP were cancelled, and – following her 2019 Glastonbury appearance – 2020's teased *Black Diamond* album and tour both failed to materialise. With no new projects announced, this run of concerts is perhaps unexpected, though welcomed – 50+ years is as good an excuse as any.

Opener Wyclef Jean does a decent job in getting the crowd warmed up. "They call me the man behind the music," he declares midway through a brief set that sees him run through hits, chomp out a guitar solo with his teeth, and bust some moves during Shakira's *Hips Don't Lie*.

Despite the on-stage theatrics, it's his lengthy excursion into the crowd that really gets everyone excited.

Though visually a treat, Janet's arrival is more considered. Appearing wrapped in a giant billowing duvet/coat to low-key tracks from *Unbreakable* and 2008's *Discipline*, she loosens up quickly. "I can do this all night!" Janet cries while dancing to the clipped groove of *All Nite (Don't Stop)*. We don't doubt it.

Act II amps things up further with the emphasis placed on breakthrough LP *Control*, although it's the material from follow-up album *Rhythm Nation* that arguably powers the night. A taut social commentary and call for action, the record made an indelible mark in 1989, and Janet notes that tracks such as *The Knowledge* – with its call for an end to prejudice, ignorance, bigotry and illiteracy – still feel criminally pertinent.

Throughout the four well-paced acts, the youngest Jackson family member and her four-man dance crew (backed by a five-piece band) maintain an energetic presence, while her voice exudes an appealing warmth – even when she does get 'nasty', wielding a baseball bat and groping a dancer.

Fittingly, the night ends on a celebratory note and the tune from *The Velvet Rope* that gave the tour its moniker, the loved-up *Together Again*. And suddenly the curtain comes down (literally) and the credits roll (again, literally) – with everyone from the band and dancers to laser operators, drivers, masseuse, seamstress and personal trainer namechecked, wrapping up a skilfully choreographed 100-minute 39-song ride. Piling up decades of hits while swiftly segueing one tune into another, nothing feels rushed or forced, with a constantly moving Janet in fine voice throughout.

If the show falters anywhere it's that we really see nothing of Janet's personality – bar the occasional wink – and the production, while impressive, doesn't truly wow like some other superstar shows. But these are minor quibbles in an otherwise regal night of pure entertainment from true pop royalty. **Dave Freak**

SETLIST

❶ Night
❷ 2nite
❸ Slolove
❹ Rock With U
❺ Throb
❻ All Nite (Don't Stop)
❼ No Sleeep
❽ Got 'til It's Gone
❾ That's The Way Love Goes
❿ Love Will Never Do (Without You)
⓫ What Have You Done For Me Lately
⓬ Nasty
⓭ The Pleasure Principle
⓮ You Want This
⓯ When I Think Of You
⓰ Diamonds
⓱ The Best Things In Life Are Free
⓲ Control
⓳ Son Of A Gun (I Betcha Think This Song Is About You)
⓴ Take Care
㉑ Let's Wait Awhile
㉒ Again
㉓ Any Time, Any Place
㉔ I Get Lonely
㉕ With U
㉖ Runaway
㉗ All For You
㉘ Alright
㉙ Escapade
㉚ Miss You Much
㉛ Feedback
㉜ So Excited
㉝ State Of The World
㉞ The Knowledge
㉟ If
㊱ Scream
㊲ Rhythm Nation

ENCORE
㊳ Whoops Now
㊴ Together Again

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CLARE GROGAN DUSTS DOWN HER BLACK FROCK AND PEARLS TO CELEBRATE ALTERED IMAGES' *BITE* – AND LEAVES US WITH AN APPETITE FOR MORE…

A year on from the 40th anniversary vinyl of Altered Images' *Bite*, vocalist Clare Grogan and her re-powered combo are celebrating their third studio album by playing it in full alongside a greatest hits set.

Released in summer 1983, *Bite* was the first incarnation of Altered Images' swansong. Following on from their mostly Steve Severin-produced debut album and Martin Rushent sophomore effort, *Bite* paired the Glaswegians with Bowie/T.Rex collaborator Tony Visconti and Mike Chapman, who'd helped steer Blondie to megastardom.

With their previous album underperforming, and a new, more sophisticated musical direction planned, *Bite* was set to be the record that pushed Altered Images to the next level.

Initially, it seemed to go to plan as first single, *Don't Talk To Me About Love*, gave the band their first Top 10 hit in two years. However, subsequent tracks made less impact. *Smash Hits* deemed *Bite* "weedy", and within months, Altered Images were history.

But with its belated successor, 2022's *Mascara Streakz*, having much in common with *Bite*'s spirit, a reappraisal now feels perfectly timed.

Resplendent in a black gown and pearls, Grogan has dressed for the occasion. Backed by her altered Altered Images – guitarists Gillian Bickerstaff and Andrew Cowan, with bassist Mandy Clarke and new drummer Kyle Sharp – they start well, jumping into the disco-influenced sweep of *Bring Me Closer* and hooky *Another Lost Look*.

Between tracks Clare recalls her 20-year-old self flying to L.A. to sing with a mic previously used by her idol, Debbie Harry. "I was living my dream," she coos before *Bite*'s winning standout, *Don't Talk To Me About Love*. It's the first song that Grogan ever wrote with future husband, drummer/guitarist-turned-restaurateur Steve Lironi.

From there, *Stand So Quiet* bubbles nicely and *Change Of Heart* feels like it should have been a hit – it failed to chart. Yet before you know it, it's time for the last chunk of *Bite* – the lush swayer *Thinking About You*.

After a quick aside about the LP's short running time, the band disappears for a costume change, before returning for a career-spanning seven-song mini-set. *I Could Be Happy*, *Dead Pop Stars*, dedicated to John Peel, and *See Those Eyes* have a spiky urgency absent from the earlier set.

Meanwhile, recent track *Glitter Ball* – a co-write with Clare's neighbour Bernard Butler – delivers on *Bite*'s disco-pop promise, shimmering with a Kylie-esque vibe. Of course, everything's wrapped up with a buoyant *Happy Birthday*.

Forty years later, *Bite* remains as flawed as ever. Yet tonight's run-through has a lightness and brevity that ensures even the more forgettable tracks never outstay their welcome. While Clare, chatty and in good voice despite a recent chest infection, makes for a charming host, and wrapping up with a separate hits set means the night ends on a genuine high.

However, more old tunes and some of those *Bite*-era CD B-sides would have been very welcome additions. As it is, we're left not so much unsatisfied – far from it – but with an appetite for a larger helping next time. **Dave Freak**

SETLIST

BITE SET

❶ Bring Me Closer
❷ Another Lost Look
❸ Love To Stay
❹ Now That You're Here
❺ Don't Talk To Me About Love
❻ Stand So Quiet
❼ Change Of Heart
❽ Thinking About You

SET 2

❾ I Could Be Happy
❿ Mascara Streakz
⓫ Dead Pop Stars
⓬ Double Reflection
⓭ See Those Eyes
⓮ Glitter Ball
⓯ Happy Birthday

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BABYLON ZOO
spaceman

BABYLON ZOO TEMPORARILY GO INTO ORBIT

27 JANUARY 1996

It started, like so many hit singles of the 80s and 90s, with an advert. In 1995, Levi's broadcast an ad soundtracked by a song from a band by the name of Babylon Zoo.

The track, *Spaceman*, had been the first single from the group and its snazzily-named frontman Jas Mann. Though a planned CD release had been scrapped by Warner after the company's departing MD took his new signing to EMI, a promo copy found its way to a Manchester radio station, where it was heard by an advertising company who'd been tasked with coming up with a campaign for the jeans manufacturers.

When the ad appeared in late 1995, the song – or at least the snippet Levi's used of it – became a sensation, and EMI realised they had a potential smash hit on their hands. Despite the rest of the song descending into a grungy dirge, this full-length version of *Spaceman* went straight to No.1, becoming EMI's fastest-selling 45 since The Beatles' *She Loves You*.

Yet its success did little for the fortunes of Babylon Zoo. Though its accompanying album, *The Boy With The X-Ray Eyes*, made the UK Top 10 and its other singles found the Top 40, the group dissolved shortly after the release of their second LP, *King Kong Groover*. **Steve O'Brien**

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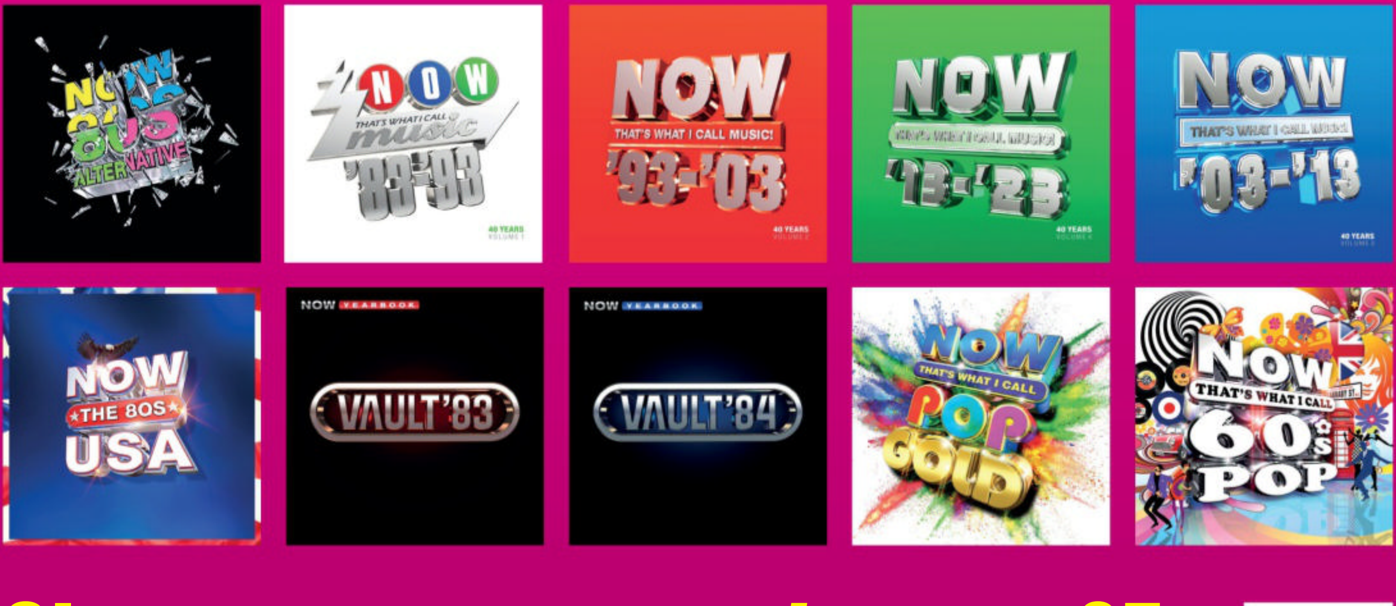
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